

**TRADITION, INNOVATION AND POLITICS: THE
STAGE WORK OF EWAN MACCOLL AND THEATRE
WORKSHOP**

Claire Altree

PhD
The University of Edinburgh
2007



CONTENTS

Preface

Introduction

Doing Justice to the Stage Work

Chapter One

“Theatre must face up to the problems of its time”: an Exploration of Realism

Chapter Two

The Working Class Deserve Poetry: Theatrical Experimentation

Chapter Three

“Being prepared to salvage all that was best in the theatre of the past” Part One: the Oral Tradition

Chapter Four

“Being prepared to salvage all that was best in the theatre of the past” Part Two: the Literary Tradition

Chapter Five

Conclusion

“Politics was the binding force, the cement that held everything together, but theatre for the next twenty years—was the medium”: the Legacy of Ewan MacColl

Appendix One

List of Plays with Plot Sketches

Appendix Two

Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Material Relating to Ewan MacColl

Bibliography

PREFACE

Since my approach entails moving quite often from one script to another in a comparative way, and since many of the scripts in question are not at all well-known and are in some cases hard to come by, I have included plot-summaries along with additional background information about each of them in Appendix One.

This thesis uses the MLA system of documentation.

This thesis owes a great debt of gratitude to all who have influenced my academic career to date and to those who introduced me to the wonderful world of Theatre and English Literature. Grateful appreciation to all at the University of Edinburgh who have helped, encouraged and challenged me in my work, and especially to the postgraduate community and LLC who generously granted me funding during my PhD. Particular thanks to my supervisors Olga Taxidou and Roger Savage who have been so patient and kind, and whose recommendations and suggestions have had such an impact on my work. Thank you both for your commitment to this project and your willingness to give of your time so freely. I also acknowledge the support and help of Robert Leach who has so influenced my work over the years. Thanks to Kat for keeping me going and sharing so many fun times with me. Furthermore I must also thank Peggy Seeger and Jean Newlove for their help and willingness to allow me to study MacColl's plays. There are also so many librarians and academics who have invested time into this project. Thanks to all at the Working Class Movement Library in Salford, the Labour History Archive at John Rylands, Ruskin College in Oxford and the National Library of Scotland, and to all who have been so accommodating and supportive.

This thesis is dedicated to my wonderful family and friends who I give thanks for daily. Thanks to my grandparents who have so generously shared their lives and time with me and from whom I have learnt so much. Special thanks to Mum, Dad and Sal. Thanks for all your love and support. You have always encouraged me to fulfil my potential and I so appreciate all that you have done for me. And thank you to my fiancé David for supporting me in every way. I am glad to have you.

This thesis celebrates the plays of Ewan MacColl and many others whose work has been largely forgotten.

INTRODUCTION

DOING JUSTICE TO THE STAGE WORK

The central aim of this thesis is to provide a descriptive, analytical and critical assessment of the stage work of Ewan MacColl. Although he wrote upwards of twenty plays during his time with Theatre Workshop and later, most of them remain languishing in archives. They did receive a certain amount of acclaim in the 1930s, '40s and early '50s but, notwithstanding a 7:84 revival of *Johnny Noble* in 1982, they have been very little performed for nearly half a century. They deserve a fresh evaluation. MacColl is, of course, famous for his work in the folk revival and the invention of the 'radio ballad' form with Charles Parker and Peggy Seeger, and the thesis briefly links his plays to his folk music and Radio Ballads. But it does not discuss the latter in any detail. The thesis may well have its uses for anyone with an interest in the folk revival or British radio history, for it is in his collaborative work with Theatre Workshop that the origins of his later projects lie. Rather than dwell on his later innovations, our subject here is his stage work, particularly the plays written during the period before 1952 when Theatre Workshop moved to its permanent home at Stratford East and MacColl left the company. It occasionally points to plays written after 1952 (*Festival of Fools* and *St George and the Dragon* in particular); but largely it concentrates on the plays MacColl wrote between 1934 (*John Bullion*) and 1952 (*The Travellers* and *The Long Winter*).

My primary, overarching concern is with the relationship between politics and formal technique. According to MacColl, a playwright should contemplate "the emotion that shakes him and decide how he's going to communicate this feeling" (May, *Voice of Experience*). It is this association of content and form, of politics and artistic genre that is at the centre of what follows. Formally, as will be illustrated below, MacColl's work consistently embodies an experimental approach, utilising traditional genres of the literary and oral conventions as well as the innovations of the European avant-garde to develop his own style of realism: one that could confront the everyday experiences of the working class. The term 'realism' is evidently complex and contentious. I use the term to describe a dramatic method associated with twentieth-century experience, a form that "is inextricable from the new social forces and new versions of social relationships" (Williams, *Realism, Naturalism and their Alternatives* 3). Realist theatre in all its

myriad versions must confront these forces and relationships. It was this sole aim that provided the impetus for all MacColl's play-making:

We were concerned mainly with working-class audiences... Well, you began to ask yourself, how can a theatre be healthy— how can you have a theatrical language even— if you're not playing to people who produce wealth? And in an industrial society the people who produce wealth are the industrial workers (Woods. *Folk Review* May 1973 4).

Realism is often misunderstood as synonymous with naturalism, and it is this misinterpretation that MacColl's stage work challenges. Aspects of naturalism are present in his work, but so are techniques associated with the European avant-garde, American Modernism, and indigenous and Continental oral traditions. These are not a repudiation of the realist spirit, rather they are a development of it, as Raymond Williams reveals,

In reaction against the naturalist habit conventions have been developed *to take more account of reality, to include psychological as well as external reality, and to show the social and physical world as a dynamic rather than a merely passive and determining environment. These innovations are often described as moves beyond realism and naturalism* but the confusing irony is that most of them are attempts to realise more deeply and adequately the original impulses of the realist and naturalist movements (2).

Conventions associated with movements such as Expressionism, Constructivism, Mummung, the *commedia dell'arte* and others— movements that influenced MacColl's stage work— inform realism rather than negate it.

My primary aim in this thesis is to reappraise MacColl's stage work in light of all this and to discuss it with reference to twentieth-century socio-political history and theatrical experimentation. In the process I will challenge some of the widely-held views about British theatre history: that the British stage in mid-century is almost universally formally and thematically conservative and that 1956 marked the only significant turning point in indigenous twentieth-century theatre. Rather it could be said that the achievements of Theatre Workshop connect the Workers' Theatre Movement of the 1930s with the exciting expansion of politically engaged theatre in the 1970s. Continually pointing to this idea of theatrical genealogy and tradition, the thesis will analyse MacColl's plays as examples of innovative, formally experimental and politically challenging drama, of a "theatre more capable of dealing with the reality of the world we were living in" (Goorney and MacColl xlvii).

CHAPTER ONE

“THEATRE MUST FACE UP TO THE PROBLEMS OF ITS TIME”: AN EXPLORATION OF REALISM

On this dead stage we'll make society appear.
The world is here-
Our world.

(MacColl, *Johnny Noble* 36)

i. “My great dream was to become a writer”: early experimentation with agitprop

Ewan MacColl's early interest in the dramatic form was grounded in the politics of his birthplace, Salford, rather than in a formal theatrical aesthetic. His agitprop drama and indeed, his later plays for Theatre Workshop were a response to the socio-political situation and originated in a desire to dramatise his specific working-class sphere of experience and create a theatre that promoted direct political challenge in a reaction to the injustices he perceived around him. It was a search for a functional 'realism', a theatre that could respond to and reflect his own community, and so it was firmly grounded in the locality both politically and aesthetically. Manchester-Salford has consistently had a major role in the promulgation of politically challenging rhetoric in Britain and as we shall see, is also a city with great and long-lasting traditions of literature, art and drama. MacColl's plays, and specifically his 'Salford plays' *Portrait of a Salford Street* and *Landscape with Chimneys*, which are the primary focus of this chapter, mark an extension to the Mancunian traditions of political agitation and cultural pursuit.

Politically Manchester has consistently been a site of confrontation and agitation. As Eddie and Ruth Frow suggest in their pamphlet *The Communist Party in Manchester 1920-26*, the Manchester-Salford city space contained numerous groups affiliated to the Communist party, and left-wing political demonstrations, speeches and events were commonplace. From the 'Red Week' of 1922 (Frow, *Communist Party* 15) to the celebration of the Russian revolution at the Free Trade Hall (31) the Northern branches of the Communist party were active and committed.

Manchester has also played an instrumental role in the growth of Chartism¹ (Engels 238-9) and was central to the Suffragette movement of the early twentieth century. Indeed, Emmeline Pankhurst was born in Manchester. As the co-founder of Theatre Workshop and producer of many of MacColl's plays, Joan Littlewood recalled as she arrived in Manchester, "this was the Classic Soil² of Communism" (Littlewood. *Joan's Book* 75). Historians agree that Manchester-Salford cityscape "has always been a revolutionary city in the sense that waves of social, economic and political change, while not always made in Manchester, nearly always yield particularly vivid expressions and/or responses here" (Peck and Ward 9). Since the Peterloo massacre of 1819 the prime industrial city of the northwest of England was "feared as a centre of class conflict" (Davies and Fielding eds. 1-2).³

This centre of political dissidence became the catalyst for and prominent theme of MacColl's theatre. He became involved with the local Communist party during his youth⁴. His mother and father were closely associated with left-wing

¹ This movement began in the mid-nineteenth century and sought, according to the pamphlet *The Question 'What is a Chartist?' Answered*, "1. Universal Suffrage—2. Annual Parliaments—3. Vote by Ballot—4. Equal Representation—5. Payment of Members—6. No Property Qualification" (Jones 22). Many of the meetings and conventions were held in Manchester. Chartism was a national movement, yet there were significant disagreements between the south (London) and the north. In 1851 the 'Manchester School' of Chartists even had their own separate events and executives (Jones 175). Manchester consistently parades a political independence that resists the dominance of London. Saying that, MacColl was interested in Chartist history as a whole and in 1951 he wrote *The Chartist March* for the BBC, for which many regional studios in the country came together "so that we followed the course of the march studio by studio, so to speak, with scenes I wrote specially for each of the places" (Woods, *Folk Review* June 1973 6).

² 'Classic Soil' is a term used by Engels in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. He wrote "if we cross Blackstone Edge by road or railway, we enter upon that classic soil on which English manufacture has achieved its masterwork and from which all labour movements emanate, namely, south Lancashire with its central city Manchester" (82). Littlewood adopted the term and in 1939 wrote a piece for radio entitled *Classic Soil*. Ben Harker reflects that "for Littlewood, Manchester was not only the 'classic soil' of the industrial revolution; it was, as she said in another context, 'The Classic Soil of Communism'" (Harker, *Was there another England?* 39).

³ Davies and Fielding go on to cite the shift in power from Manchester to Birmingham and London in the twentieth century. However, MacColl and his comrades remained part of this vibrant Mancunian tradition of political subversion and social change.

⁴ The relationship between Communist political thought and art is of course highly controversial, fraught with conflict and debate. MacColl's interaction with the local Communist Party and with the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) more generally was consistently strained. There were naturally noticeable similarities between MacColl's ideas and the generally held views of the CPGB leadership. A short pamphlet entitled *A Communist Policy for the Theatre* perhaps most effectively elucidates the position of the CPGB leaders with regards to cultural production. It concludes that "theatre must become once more an integral part of the people, regarded not as a luxury or a business enterprise, but as something essential to the progress and well-being of the entire nation" (15): a statement that summarises the primary aim of MacColl's own writing. For MacColl theatre, as will be revealed through this thesis, marked an intervention in and a way of determining the social and political class struggle. The

politics, and, according to MacColl his father wept the day Lenin died (Orr and O'Rourke Part Two). For a boy the Communist movement and the groups and meetings associated with it was infused with theatre. Of its Worker's Arts Club discussions he relates that "for anyone with a sense of drama these sessions were absolutely invaluable; for a fourteen-year-old hopeful on the threshold of a fifty-year love-affair with the theatre they were unforgettable experiences" (MacColl and Goorney xiv). His descriptions of these events are imbued with images of performativity⁵, intricately depicting these working class intellectuals as they clarified the arguments of Proudhon or Kant. He maintains that "the smallest of gestures was loaded with drama" and confesses his compulsion to applaud (ibid). These early experiences provided him with an image of declamatory theatre and a realisation of the powerful impact direct and engaging speech can have on an

Workers' Theatre Movement (WTM) was an integral part of the CPGB's cultural programme. Indeed, "the WTM embodied the total world of the CPGB, as the political and the cultural coalesced to produce a working class theatre that was rooted firmly in the class struggle" (Worley 208). Evidently, the British Communist Party placed a substantial value on cultural pursuits and pastimes; "party members were routinely encouraged to read, write, sing, speak, act, even to make films" (Croft ed. 4). There were a noticeable number of organic intellectuals in a Gramscian sense, but in the CPGB all members had a role as a producer of culture and as a thinker. As Gramsci conceded, "all men are intellectuals, one could say: but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals" (9). The CPGB did produce, for a short time, a noticeably radical aesthetic. With the WTM and other innovative groups for the proletariat (the film societies, sporting groups and socialist Sunday schools) the CPGB did contribute to a perceptible transformation in the cultural development of the working class. However, the Party, or at least the Party leadership eventually made a marked move away from the innovations of societies such as the WTM. There was a continual tension in the Party "which never made up its mind whether literary culture was something to be enjoyed or endured, an unpredictable source of pleasure and wonder or a political weapon" (Andrews et al. 91). Gradually the Party leadership began to suppress the ideas and cultural production of some of its members. Rather than create poetic, experimental or inventive artistic work, the leadership began to turn towards the Socialist Realism that before long dominated the cultural scene of the Russian Soviet state. By 1929, according to Henry Pelling, the CPGB was "reduced to an almost slavish submission to Moscow" (54). This influenced the political opinions of the CPGB leadership and the structure of the Party, but it also affected cultural production. The Russian Party began to rein in Modernist experiments in the late 1920s and the CPGB followed its example. The central committee began to display "an active hostility towards the more creative spirits and protégés of the party's literary intelligentsia" (Morgan 207). MacColl, and Littlewood, experienced this attempt by the King Street leadership to suppress artistic innovation and individualistic creativity. MacColl recalls "now the party district committee began to question the wisdom of leaving an influential group [Theatre of Action] in the hands of a couple of prima donnas. It wasn't that the Party objected to prima donnas as such but it wanted the prima donnas to be of its choosing" (Samuel et al. 250). This episode eventually led to a split in the group and, though they narrowly escaped expulsion, this event marked the demise of Theatre of Action.

⁵ 'Performativity' here is partly used in a Butlerian sense that " '*performative*' suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning" (Butler 177). The speakers at the rallies and gatherings MacColl attended actively 'constructed' meaning in order to incite the audience and fellow comrades to action. It also relates to Richard Schechner's concept where "performativity—or, commonly, 'performance'—is everywhere is life, from ordinary gestures to macrodramas" (326). The everyday is consistently revealed as 'performative'; this concept does not relate solely to the stage, but describes regular actions and dialogues in day-to-day material existence.

audience. In addition, MacColl's experience of the Means Test demonstrations of 1931, and particularly his involvement with the Battle of Bexley Square⁶ appealed to his sense of occasion and performance. As Raphael Samuel says, there is a perceptible connection between theatre and political protest: "a political demonstration is necessarily an act of street theatre, albeit one with a multitudinous cast, and a rhythm and tempo of its own" (Samuel et al. xv.)

Stimulated by this contact with individuals who were both politically and intellectually engaged MacColl recognised the urgency to create a medium that could both educate and stimulate his audience; his theatre began with politics, grounded in Mancunian working-class experience and a Communist conviction. He reflects that "we were searching for words which would rouse our audience to immediate action, words that would burn like fire and set our slum ablaze" (MacColl, *Journeyman* 207). The inextricable connection between MacColl's Manchester and MacColl's theatre marks him out as a type of 'organic intellectual' in a Gramscian sense. Gramsci⁷ presents two different categories of intellectual. The first traditional sort is associated with scientific and artistic advancement on a professional level. Such figures represent a historical continuity and are often regarded as independent from the social systems that surround them (Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks* 7). Organic intellectuals, by contrast, are inescapably aligned with a specific class and the direction of specific ideas. Rather than being disconnected from everyday life, they (and MacColl among them) engage fully with material actuality. Therefore, "the mode of being of the new [organic] intellectual can no longer consist in eloquence, which is an exterior and momentary mover of feelings and passions, but in active participation in practical life" (10). Intellectual thought becomes an integral aspect of practical experience; "*homo faber* cannot be separated from *homo sapiens*" (9). MacColl embodies this inseparability, this "awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political" (5).

⁶ These two events became emotive symbols of the class struggle, particularly in the Manchester-Salford conurbation. The Means Test marked an attempt by the government to cut back on the amount of money given in benefits. However, it meant that families were turned against each other, younger family members became the prominent wage-earners and the role of the man became one of humiliating subservience. Eric Hopkins reflects that "the Means Test remains today the most bitter memory of the 1930s for many of the surviving working classes" (232). Whereas the Means Test affected the working class countrywide, the Battle for Bexley Square was a more localised event where protestors marched to demonstrate against the injustices associated with capitalist industrial growth. For further information relating to this event, see Frow, *The Battle For Bexley Square*.

⁷ It remains uncertain as to whether MacColl was aware of Gramsci's writings. It certainly seems likely that he had some knowledge as his good friend Hamish Henderson edited an English translation of Gramsci's *Prison Letters* in 1988.

Due to this inextricable connection with political discourse, his early theatrical work is markedly different from the sort of repertory commonly encountered in the Manchester playhouses even that repertory in its most earnest form.⁸ Yet he does admit that more typical, recognisable theatre did have a certain impact on his early dramatic aesthetic. He was introduced to mainstream theatre in the form of the 'well-made play' by the school play-reading society and maintains that, although these plays were fairly conventional examples of the dramatic form, "they were enormously important to me and it was through them and the play-reading society that my decision to work in the theatre first took form" (MacColl, *Journeyman* 108). His education was further enhanced when the family's lodger, Charlie Harrison, introduced him to the Clarion Players (MacColl, *Journeyman* 166), where he familiarised himself with plays such as Hauptmann's *The Weavers*, Toller's *The Machine-Wreckers* and works by Shaw and Ibsen (MacColl and Goorney xix). This early contact with the drama certainly engendered an interest in theatre as artistic form. However, his early works do not resemble the structured plays of Hauptmann or Shaw: his experiments are noticeably different in content and in formal structure, for in response to his specific Mancunian experience and the overwhelming need to promulgate a specific political challenge, MacColl and his company the Red Megaphones⁹ worked exclusively within the genre of agitprop: "That's for me, I thought, street theatre! Agitprop!" (MacColl, *Journeyman* 166).

This agitprop format is, I suggest, the primary reason why, unfortunately, none of his very early work survives. The shows were put together in response to

⁸ The plays MacColl saw may well have been uninspiring and conservative in both form and content, but Manchester indubitably has a perceptible tradition of politically engaged or at least working-class focused theatre. In 1907 the first repertory theatre in Great Britain was established in Manchester (Pogson 23). Miss Horniman's Gaiety Theatre experimented with form; Ben Iden Payne, who adapted some of the techniques of Granville-Barker, created a form of realism that was directly related to the inherent vitality of the play. He had an "ability to dig beneath the surface of a play" (Pogson 106). Pogson says that "one of the heartening things about the Gaiety was that it created, from the working class, a new body of people interested in drama" (192). There is a suggestion that, although the Gaiety became a cinema in the early 1920s, "its influence on the cultural life of the city was still evident in the 1930's" (Goorney 6). During the early decades of the twentieth century, Manchester was also the site of a new theatrical school of thought. Leading figures in this movement included Stanley Houghton, who wrote *Hindle Wakes* (1912), which according to Howard Goorney's genealogy of Theatre Workshop productions was performed by Littlewood and company in 1953 (Goorney 204), and Harold Brighouse, whose most well-known play is *Hobson's Choice* (1916). Both playwrights looked to the industrial northern town for dramatic inspiration and theatricalise the everyday experiences of the Lancashire working class. As Howard Goorney states, "culturally, Manchester was the Second City, a position she has maintained to this day" (6).

⁹ The Red Megaphones was the name MacColl gave to his first theatre group, deriving it from the name of a German group (Stourac and McCreery 157, 167).

very specific situations, such as the mill strikes in Lancashire in 1931-2 (Goorney and MacColl xxiv); this engendered work that was therefore largely unscripted and improvised, combining song and declamation. It was by its nature evanescent and transitory. However, MacColl's thoughts about this period do remain, as do copies of playscripts from other sources performed by the Red Megaphones.

As a term 'agitprop' (meaning 'agitational propaganda') was first associated with political and governmental organisation, but with the advent of politically engaged drama groups in both Russia and Germany, it became a theatrical term. MacColl and the company became aware of it through the influence of the Blue Blouses. The Blue Blouses originated in Russia but groups of them were active throughout Eastern Europe and Germany (Leach, *Revolutionary Theatre* 168), though Britain remained largely untouched by this movement. Their primary objective was to utilise the generic conventions of agitprop (immediacy, flexibility, declamation, simplicity of staging, political engagement) in order to agitate the 'audience'; the Blue Blouses created an aesthetic that "not only shows our way of life like a mirror but influences the brain of the spectator with all scenic means and prepares him for the perception of the new conditions" (Drain 182). During the early days with the Red Megaphones, MacColl met a Comrade Ludmilla, a Russian with links to Communist Youth International. MacColl remembered "her telling me about these groups that she'd seen in Germany and Czechoslovakia. She told me what they did, how they had megaphones and how they would appear on a street and do a very short political piece. This stuck in my mind as something absolutely marvellous" (Samuel et al. 228). Agitprop formed the basis of the Blue Blouse political aesthetic and was to fulfil a similar role in MacColl's own theatrical innovations.

This term 'agit-prop' is defined neatly by Jon Clark as an artistic juxtaposition of agitation and propaganda where "agitation referred to political activity in the day-to-day campaign demands, issues and struggles; propaganda referred to the broader and more long-term activity of winning people to the general aims of the labour movement" (Clark et al. 222). Agitprop therefore contains reference both to specific, contemporary situations, and to the greater political movement. It creates a balance between particularity (a specific event or circumstance) and generality (Marxist theories and the necessity of revolution). This is evident in one of the Red Megaphones' earliest productions of the North-West London Hammer And Sickle Group's *Meerut* (performed by the Red

Megaphones in 1931-2), a play which also exhibits some of agitprop's primary theatrical techniques in its use of declamation and direct dramatisation of a contemporary issue without the apparatus of conventional theatre (Goorney and MacColl xxii). This play specifically enacts the plight of the workers of the mines and the mills in India: "the average wage for all workers and peasants is less than a shilling a day in India—the brightest jewel in Britain's crown" (1)¹⁰. Although the dominant theme of the play is the predicament of Indian workers, it also encourages class unity and a reaction against the British government's instigation of the Means Test (3):

Workers of Britain unite your power with the Indian toilers. This is your fight. Those who have jailed the workers in India are the men who cut wages and enforce the Means test in Britain (3).

This agitprop play refers to both a particular situation and the revolutionary potential of a unified working class. Jon Clark suggests that agitprop is a theatre of mobility infused with "adaptability, immediacy, topicality" (Clark et al. 223) and *Meerut* is a case in point. Many of the company's other agitprop presentations were equally topical, addressing specific events and issues that could be recognised by the working-class crowd. One example was a piece compiled in response to strikes in the cotton industry which was "mostly mass declamation enlivened by rhythmic movements based on the working actions of a weaver and a mule-spinner" (Goorney and MacColl xxv).

The mobility of the theatre was particularly vital to MacColl and the Red Megaphones at this early stage in their development; as he recalled, "the small cast, the marvellously portable 'set' and the brevity of the sketch [*Meerut*] made it a perfect item for a street-drama group" (Goorney and MacColl xxii). *Meerut* did not require a theatre building or complex scenery. The actors used large poles to represent the prison bars the plot requires. This simplicity of set is evident in MacColl's own reminiscences of this period which indicates that early performances were staged exclusively outdoors on the steps of the public baths or at the dock gates on Trafford Road (Goorney and MacColl xxiii). The group eventually progressed to a cart that served as a platform for their performances (Goorney and MacColl xxvii). The simplicity of agitprop staging appealed to the Red Megaphones. This is an aspect of MacColl's aesthetic that remains unchanged throughout his theatrical canon; the simple platform remains the primary means of

¹⁰ The script for *Meerut* can be found online at www.wcml.org.uk/internat/meerut_play.htm

staging a performance. This aspect of his theatre was later informed by the *mise-en-scène* of the ancient Greek theatre and the experimentation of the Russian Constructivists, but initially the platform stage was purely a practical necessity.

Agitprop is the foundation for MacColl's realism. With its simplicity of production and focus on actual socio-political situations it appealed both aesthetically and politically. As MacColl recalled, "when I heard about the Agit-Prop I thought it sounded great. You didn't need any special costumes or elaborate props, we could just wear bib-and-bob overalls" (Samuel et al. 230). All the company's early productions (the parodies of songs like *Billy Boy*, the sketches about mining and the cotton industry, the WTM scripts *Rent, Interest and Profit* and *Their Theatre and Ours* and, of course, *Meerut*)¹¹ were infused with this theatrical method. It remained an important part of The Red Megaphones' aesthetic during its transition to Theatre of Action in the mid 1930s with plays such as *Waiting for Lefty* by Clifford Odets, performed by the company in 1935, which "contained many agit-prop elements in its make-up...[the play] made use of the public-meeting framework and, consequently...[did not need] much in the way of décor and props" (Goorney and MacColl xxxv). Through agitprop the Red Megaphones were able to create a malleable, flexible theatre that could engage with actual events outside the confines of mainstream theatre. Richard Bodek in his study of German agitprop performances argues that "agitprop was more than theater, rather it was the truth: the proletariat's feelings, thoughts, struggles, sorrows, and class consciousness were the core of its performance" (Bodek 120). It was this focus on the truth and on the destabilising of conventional arguments and suppositions as expounded by the bourgeois leadership that caused MacColl to adopt agitprop as the basis for his aesthetic, as a technique to respond directly to his experience in Manchester-Salford. Indeed this dramatic form confronted actual material conditions to such an extent that MacColl and the Red Megaphones regarded themselves as "guerrillas using the theatre as a weapon against the capitalist system" (Goorney and MacColl xxvi). From these early experimentations in agitprop to his later forays into naturalism¹², Expressionism, Constructivism and dance, a full engagement with contemporary existence beyond the theatre walls: realism in its fullest and most active sense, remains his primary objective.

¹¹ For the most detailed study of the early work of MacColl and the Red Megaphones see Samuel et al. 227-240.

¹² MacColl did not employ a pure naturalistic form but infused his naturalism with Modernist techniques and metatheatrical elements, as will be more fully discussed later in this chapter.

ii. Mancunian naturalism in the novel and on the stage

The theatre, if it is to live, must of necessity reflect the spirit of the age. This spirit is found
in the social conflicts which dominate world history today.
Manifesto of Theatre of Action, 1936.
(Goorney 11)

Naturalism alone corresponds to our social needs; it alone has deep roots in the spirit of our
times.

Zola. *Naturalism in the Theatre*
(Bentley, *Theory of the Modern Stage* 351)

Individual works must be assessed according to how far they have grasped reality in a
concrete instance, and not how far they correspond in formal terms to a proposed model of a
historical type.
(Willett, *Brecht on Art and Politics* 228)

The thematic concerns and political engagement of agitprop remain the perpetual cornerstones in MacColl's pursuit of a workable, functional realism yet he recognised that "agit-prop techniques could be adapted and developed, and could form the base of a much more effective theatrical form" (Samuel et al. 242): "what we were envisaging was an extension of agitprop [he said]...we wanted our agitprop to be both explosive and subtle, fierce and compassionate, abrasive and at the same time as sleek as an otter" (MacColl, *Journeyman* 208). This 'extension of agitprop' maintains the political fervency and continues to focus on the everyday outwith the theatre walls but also calls on additional techniques. This section attempts to narrate MacColl's pursuit of a realism that could articulate his socio-political agenda, a form able to present the material conditions of the working class and suggest a method of socio-political transformation. How can actual material existence effectively be presented upon the stage? Which subjects or themes can be addressed in the theatrical mode? Is there a specific formal construct that is most appropriate for the dissemination of these ideas? Is realism a question of form, content or both? Sections ii to iv of this chapter will discuss MacColl's progression from agitprop to his experiments in naturalism and a Brechtian-style epic theatre, revealing his conviction that he could create a "new, exciting theatrical language" (Samuel et al. 248).

MacColl's preoccupation with addressing actual socio-political concerns profoundly shaped him in his search for a suitable formal structure. Indeed, perhaps the most pertinent artistic form would have been the novel. Emile Zola, one of the

prominent figures of the naturalist movement had sums up to major project of novelistic naturalism as follows:

The naturalistic novelists observe and experiment, and...all their work is the offspring of the doubt which seizes them in the presence of truths little known and phenomena unexplained, until an experimental idea rudely awakens their genius some day, and urges them to make an experiment, to analyze facts, and to master them (Kettle ed. 309).

It is this dialogistic relationship between observation and experimentation in a quest to discern and present truth that appealed to MacColl and indeed he did attempt an account of working-class Salford in the novel form in mid-career, around 1946¹³.

Entitled *The Damnable Town* it portrays the city of Salford and the myriad of characters in her environs. The chief character Martin, a writer, seems to speak for the author when he insists that "I want to write a story of the town so that it will stand for all towns in our time" (186). This markedly resembles Georg Lukàcs' affirmation of Tolstoy: "Tolstoy's genius as an historical novelist lies in his ability to select and portray these episodes so that the entire mood of the Russian army and through them the Russian people gains vivid expression" (Lukàcs, *The Historical Novel* 43).¹⁴ MacColl's attraction to agitprop plays such as *Meerut* was due to this focus on a specific situation (in the case of *Meerut* the plight of Indian workers) in order to address more universal socio-political themes and his experimentation in the novel form partly had its origins in the agitprop of the Red Megaphones. In the novel, as in the agitprop scenario, the particular story or character can represent the general experience or situation; Martin's focus on Salford enables him to make comment on every city.

The Damnable Town focuses primarily upon the streets of the cityscape and the characters that inhabit them. This is a primary characteristic of the naturalistic novel form which, according to Zola, can "exhibit man living in social conditions produced by himself" (Kettle ed. 314). In his novel MacColl presents the people

¹³ This dating is an approximation as there is little definite proof of its completion date. However, although the date may be in question, it was certainly written before his theatrical version of Salford *Landscape with Chimneys*. There is also an earlier version of *Landscape with Chimneys* entitled *Portrait of a Salford Street* of which the only known copy, as far as I am aware, is in Ruskin College, Oxford. It is undated but certainly predates *Landscape with Chimneys*. It seems that this was a story that was consistently rewritten in various forms revealing MacColl's intense preoccupation with locating a method of writing that would effectively elucidate the Salford street and its inhabitants.

¹⁴ It remains uncertain as to whether MacColl was aware of either Lukàcs or Tolstoy. I suggest that MacColl probably had some knowledge of Tolstoy as his reminiscences about his experiences in the libraries of Manchester mention such writers as Gogol, Dostoevsky and Balzac. This, of course, remains speculative.

and the place, as Zola would attest, as dialectically relational. The northern city¹⁵ and its inhabitants have been suitable subject matter for the novelist since the nineteenth century in the writings of such authors as Charles Dickens and Elizabeth Gaskell; Manchester has consistently been a vibrant image of urban life in some of the foremost literary works of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and, in some ways, *The Damnable Town* marks a continuation of this tradition. For example, Dickens based 'Coketown' in *Hard Times* on the Manchester landscape (1854). Gaskell's *Mary Barton*, sub-titled *A Tale of Manchester Life* (published in 1848), present the northern city and the population living in the surrounding area. Like Martin in MacColl's novel, John Barton in *Mary Barton* is an unemployed worker:

But at every mill was some sign of depression of trade; some were working short hours, some were turning off hands, and for weeks Barton was out of work, living on credit (60).

Gaskell's attention focuses on the poor of the city. The novel form enabled writers such as Gaskell and later MacColl to focus on a new, largely overlooked subject: the worker. A similar concern is present in G.L. Banks' nineteenth-century novel, *The Manchester Man*, which chronicles the experiences of Jabez Clegg, found as a baby in the River Irk. Banks focuses extensively on his lowly worker origins and his eventual apprenticeship. This focus remains prevalent in twentieth-century Mancunian novels. Like John Barton, Harry Hardcastle in Walter Greenwood's novel *Love on the Dole* (published in 1933) descends into unemployment and poverty. Greenwood¹⁶ writes that "the walls of the shops, houses and places of amusement were his prison walls; lacking money to buy his way into them the doors were all closed against him" (171). For these writers it is the individual Mancunian workers who direct the narrative; it is the plight of the proletariat in the industrialised space that is of particular interest to them.

Although these novels are constructed around a specific protagonist, they not only focus on the individual but also on the social conditions of the northern city. Banks' novel contains a sustained description of the Battle of Peterloo (1819), an industrial conflict that defined the northern city during the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Gaskell, like MacColl and indeed like Friedrich Engels in his

¹⁵ By 'northern city' I refer to the urban metropolis of the north west of England.

¹⁶ MacColl was certainly aware of Greenwood's work, though it is unclear at what stage in his career he first encountered it. He does later recall that "I went to a party in Hanksy Park which was where the Salford group [of the Young Communists League] was now meeting. That's the area that Greenwood wrote about in *Love on the Dole*" (Samuel et al. 222).

critique of Manchester, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, recounts the inextricable connection between the working class and the industrial environment:

'The fever' was (as it usually is in Manchester) of a low putrid typhoid kind; brought on by miserable living, filthy neighbourhood, and great depression of body and mind (Gaskell 99).

Greenwood imagines the cityscape as a "jungle of tiny houses cramped and huddled together, the cradles of generations of the future" (14); from Salford's labyrinthine construction a new group of workers emerge. The British landscape had greatly altered during the nineteenth century until it was defined primarily by urbanisation, industrial growth and the creation of the proletariat. This consequently produced a crisis in society. Raymond Williams suggests that the novel form allowed people to develop a new kind of "knowledge and experience, as the customary ways [of understanding and describing society] broke down or receded" (Williams, *English Novel* 11). The novel became a method of defining and understanding a world in constant flux and this is arguably the primary reason that MacColl chose to experiment in this form. Williams reveals the inherent complications of this new industrialised society in his discussion of George Eliot's *Middlemarch*; he writes "in that older world there was stability and value; in the newer world, only complication, the web, a tangled business" (92). The novel enabled the nineteenth-century reader to begin a process of comprehension. Furthermore, Williams suggests that this new method of making sense of the world is particularly evident in the novel's approach to community; indeed, he maintains that the explication of community and the attempt to rediscover a sense of this term in a new society was the pre-eminent question of the nineteenth-century novelists (11). In his account of the novel Williams consistently investigates the transformation of society and the constant process of development and change:

Society, now, was not just a code to measure, an institution to control, a standard to define or to change. It was a process that entered lives, to shape or deform; a process personally known but then again suddenly distant, complex, incomprehensible, over-whelming (13).

The novel is inextricably linked with the social actualities that engendered it and proposes a realism grounded in the everyday, the authenticity of communities and the ever-changing identity of society. Formally *The Damnable Town* differs from a novel such as Gaskell's *Mary Barton* as it is written in the first person and the writer, Martin, is aware of himself as a writer. It is also constructed as a series of

pictures of the city in a similar way, perhaps, to Joyce's *Dubliners*¹⁷. In its fragmentation *The Damnable Town* marks a distinct contribution to the tradition of Mancunian prose and marks a first tentative step towards the narrative styles that would appear in MacColl's later Expressionist-influenced theatrical works. Like Gaskell, Banks and, later, Greenwood, MacColl's foray into the novelistic form with *The Damnable Town* is a protracted meditation on the city and "the million lives lived there" (69), an attempt to comprehend and actively participate in the creation of an accurate representation of the cityscape.

Eventually this pre-eminence of the 'real', the artistic explication of socio-economic issues and the dialectic of the working class and the industrial environment as seen in the novel, began to impact the stage with the arrival of a specific theatrical naturalism. This marked a radical change in performance methods. In striving to focus on the material, contemporary world through theatre, "its [naturalism's] birth was attended by controversy, [and] its existence has been marked by continuous dissent" (Gorelik 130). The arrival of naturalism into the theatre engendered controversial transformations in both style of presentation and play theme. In *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht* Williams notes that this change in the constituent elements of the theatrical began with Gerhart Hauptmann's *The Weavers* in 1892, a play which MacColl became acquainted with at his school play-reading society and which specifically deals with class and disconnects itself from the dominance of bourgeois images in Ibsen or Strindberg (Williams, *Drama* 240). There are of course lower class characters in plays such as Strindberg's *Miss Julie* (Jean and Christine) and Ibsen's *Ghosts* (Jakob and Regina Enstrand and, of course, Johanna, who never appears on stage but, due to her sexual relationship with Captain Alving and subsequent pregnancy, remains an important link between the classes), but these plays do not contain proletariat characters en masse. Hauptmann's character Baecker provides the audience with an image of the structural functioning of industrial society stating that "a true factory owner can eat two or three hundred weavers before breakfast. He won't even leave a few rotten bones. A man like that has four stomachs, like a cow, and a set of teeth like a wolf" (12). Hauptmann fulfilled Zola's hope that "the playwrights will show us real

¹⁷ MacColl was aware of Joyce during his time with the Red Megaphones. During this period a man named Joe Davies joined the group and "introduced me to writers like Joyce and Proust and Hermann Broch and Jakob Wassermann" (Samuel et al. 232).

people and not those whining members of the working class who play such strange roles in boulevard melodrama”¹⁸ (Bentley ed. 369).

MacColl retained the themes, backdrop and political engagement of *The Damnable Town* in his later theatrical explications of Salford life; there is a perceptible genealogy beginning with the novel written around 1946 and the play, initially entitled *Portrait of a Salford Street* and later remodelled as *Landscape with Chimneys*, produced by Joan Littlewood and Theatre Workshop in 1951-2. The novel remained unpublished, while the play enjoyed a tour of South Wales.¹⁹ Why did MacColl choose to expound his ideas and present an image of the urban space through the theatrical medium rather than remaining in the novel form? The answer to this question is seemingly threefold. Firstly, his own experience with the Clarion Club and political forums of Salford introduced him to the power of performance. Secondly, the very nature of theatre in its immediacy and potential to challenge lent itself to promoting certain ideas. These qualities of drama are considerable benefits particularly for any seeking to construct artworks that could respond to contemporary society. Thirdly, theatre reveals the primary thematic concerns through the visual in collusion with the linguistic, rather than purely through language as in the novel. This would be of specific advantage to an artist communicating with an audience with little formal education. Raymond Williams confesses that, “As a matter of fact I myself think that there are more practical possibilities in the whole range of drama...than there are in the novel where the problems of cultural production are very severe” (Williams, *Politics and Letters* 228). MacColl seemingly arrived at a similar conclusion.

In his search for a workable type of theatrical realism, MacColl’s aesthetic remains heavily impacted by naturalism. As with his preoccupation with the Constructivist movement, which was noticeable in his aesthetic as early as 1935 with the production of *John Bullion* which MacColl, describes as “unashamedly

¹⁸ This is perhaps a little simplistic as elements of melodrama remained prominent on the stage throughout the twentieth century with, as Elizabeth Hale Winkler suggests, “playwrights such as George Bernard Shaw, Sean O’Casey and Bertolt Brecht” (Redmond ed. 255). Indeed if Winkler is correct that two particular themes associated with melodrama, the use of music and “the characteristically simplified world of values, in which all judgements are clearcut...[and] characters are two-dimensionally good or evil” (Redmond ed. 255) continued to impact upon the aesthetics of these twentieth-century playwrights, then MacColl’s work could itself be regarded as continuing this tradition. Certainly with characters such as Graubard and Hanau in *The Other Animals* or Todt, Baldwin and miner Adamson in *Hell is What You Make It*, good and evil remain discernible and definite categories.

¹⁹ See advertising poster for *Landscape with Chimneys* in the Ruskin college archive, Oxford.

constructivist" (Goorney and MacColl xlv), his later interest in naturalism was also predominantly grounded in Russian theatrical techniques this time adapted from influential director and theatre practitioner, Stanislavsky. Robert Leach has argued that "Joan Littlewood and Ewan MacColl were also the first in Britain to attempt seriously and consistently to apply Stanislavsky's system to their work" (Leach, *Theatre Workshop* 92). As MacColl himself puts it "the point is we'd become interested in Stanislavsky" (Samuel et al. 244). Although MacColl, like Brecht, sought to distance his aesthetic from inconsequential and indeed suppressive reliance on emotion that leads to inertia in an audience, emotion is not entirely dismissed as detrimental in the creation of a working-class theatrical art. In *An Actor Prepares*, Stanislavsky reflects that "an actor is under the obligation to live his part inwardly, and then to give to his experience an external embodiment" (15). This is an aesthetic that concentrates solely on the exposition of truth. Arguably, MacColl and the company were a little different; they sought to demonstrate the truth of the material world rather than internal emotional workings of the human mind. But a focus on truth rather than stereotype or mechanical acting is a present preoccupation for both Stanislavsky and MacColl. Company member Patience Collier explains Stanislavsky's influence on the group most lucidly:

We took exercises from his book, *An Actor Prepares*, and applied them to the parts we were playing—things like units and objectives, imagination, concentration and so on (Goorney 19).

Stanislavsky's focus on the imagination is grounded in his concept of 'if'. His realism is not mimetic reproduction but, rather, concentrates on what could be, on the potential; the 'if' "acts as a lever to lift us out of the world of actuality and into the realm of the imagination" (Stanislavsky, *An Actor Prepares* 46). MacColl's plays are centred on the actual material conditions of the everyday, but every play contains this Stanislavskian 'if', a possibility of change. Truth can then be elucidated most effectively through the fictitious 'if'. MacColl admired this innovative method of explicating truth. He compares Theatre Workshop's ambitions with those of the West End theatre by citing Stanislavsky's methods. He reflects that the acting styles of the West End and British film "typified what Stanislavsky called 'rubber-stamp' acting, a series of codified gestures, and codified grimaces, and, to some extent codified dialogue" (Samuel et al. 244). As will become evident in this chapter, MacColl and Theatre Workshop did not become slavish adherents to the Stanislavskian methods and, indeed, often rejected them in favour of other styles of performance from Vakhtangov or Meyerhold or the

German Expressionists. However, Stanislavsky's sincere commitment to discerning and presenting truth remains a vital aspect of his general aesthetic.²⁰

Naturalism enabled theatre practitioners to focus on the actual material conditions of the working class through art beginning with the novel and later transferring to the theatre. It meant that, as we shall see, MacColl could elucidate his own Salford origins and the general experience of the working class through the aesthetic medium, responding to Zola's call to arms:

Take our present environment, then, and try to make men live in it: you will write great works...Therein lies the difficulty: to do great things with the subjects and characters that our eyes, accustomed to the spectacle of the daily round, have come to see as small (Bentley ed. 364).

iii 'Salford was my Paris': the urban landscape

MacColl, born in Salford²¹ in 1915, experienced the northern industrial city at firsthand; indeed "by 1931, the Manchester-Salford conurbation was the largest in Britain after Greater London, and formed one of the most densely populated industrial regions in the world" (Davies and Fielding ed. 5). In his play, *Landscape with Chimneys*, MacColl aspires to present a topographical image of Salford, to create a realism that is grounded in locality and engages in the experiences of the

²⁰ It is interesting to note that Stanislavsky was also concerned with theatre for a new audience, though his opinion of the members of this new audience did vary greatly from MacColl's own attitude. Rather scathingly Stanislavsky suggests that "two or three times after the end of an act the atmosphere...was spoiled by the crowd of still uneducated spectators" (Stanislavsky, *My Life in Art* 555); this is a conclusion that remained in sharp contrast to MacColl's aspiration to entirely destroy the fourth wall that separated audience from actor, and encourage instead interaction between the stage and the auditorium. However, Stanislavsky also perceives the advent of a working class audience as markedly beneficial. He relates that "they were spectators in the best sense of the word; they came into our Theatre not through accident but with trembling and the expectation of something important, something they had never experienced before" (556).

²¹ It has often been put that MacColl was born in Auchterarder in Scotland but this is undoubtedly false. In his introduction for MacColl's play *Uranium 235* Hugh MacDiarmid cites a Glasgow Herald critic's response to this play which stated that "the little Perthshire town of Auchterarder has produced a truly great dramatist" (6). In Orr and O'Rourke's recordings there is the implication that MacColl was born in Scotland but moved to Manchester at an early age (Orr and O'Rourke Part Two). Joan Littlewood recalls telling a Theatre Workshop company meeting that MacColl had been born in Salford and he was very angry that his true origins had been revealed (Littlewood, *Joan's Book* 389). Later in his association with the Lallans movement and his instrumental role in the folk revival he played upon his Scottish roots. This is particularly evident in his name change from the very English Jimmie Miller to the noticeably more Scottish Ewan MacColl. As Robert Leach asserts Jimmie Miller had "gone on the trot from the navy, grown a beard and changed into a Scotsman born in Auchterarder called Ewan MacColl" (Leach, *Theatre Workshop* 48).

urban space. This play narrates the homecoming of soldiers Frank and Hugh after the allied victory of the Second World War. They return to the urban community they left and attempt to reintegrate themselves into the street and its neighbourhood. The street is populated by a variety of characters, from the Irish nationalist Shaunnessey to the poetic Ginger to the neglected Gypsy. In many ways *Landscape with Chimneys* pre-empts the highly successful soap opera format of the television age; the play situates a collection of characters in a northern, specifically Salford, street just as *Coronation Street* would do just over a decade later. With their respective loves, Trudi and Clare, Frank and Hugh make plans for the future. However, it soon becomes apparent that their class status and inescapable poverty will always prevent these characters from realising their dreams. With Trudi's suicide, Gypsy's attempted attack on Shaunnessey and the presentation of bereaved and tragic Mrs Foster, this could be an intensely bleak play. However, the final scene sees the birth of Hugh and Clare's baby and the play ends with a distinct hope for change and a recognisable challenge to actor and audience alike. In *Landscape with Chimneys*, the city, its inhabitants and the profound impact of industrial expansion become prominent thematic concerns.

While the city was an important motif for Gaskell, Dickens and other nineteenth-century novelists, the metropolis remained a crucial site of enquiry for the Modernists and MacColl can therefore be situated in this movement. In *Cityscapes of Modernity*, David Frisby asserts that "the modern metropolis came to be the signifier for modernity" (178), a place of Modernist dialogue, an image of the complexities and contradictions of the modern world. This connection is equally present in the writings of Raymond Williams for whom "the city is not only...a form of modern life; it is the physical embodiment of a decisive modern consciousness" (Williams, *Country and City* 287). This inextricable association of the urban and the modern is already evident in Charles Baudelaire's mid-nineteenth century description of the modern painter:

He gazes upon the landscapes of the great city— landscapes of stone, caressed by the mist or buffeted by the sun (Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life* 10).

And from James Joyce's Dublin to Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis*, the Modernist movement is characterised by a sustained focus on the urban. In these presentations of the city and in Modernist images of the city more generally the urban space is a site fraught with complexities. In Frisby's words:

If modernity is characterized by contradictions and ambiguities, then is the same true of the concept of a cityscape? So many of the representations of our experience of modernity are tied up with our experience of the metropolis that presentations and representations of the city are likely to share in modernity's contradictions (5).

In Modernist writing the city is consistently an image of alienation; the Modernist consciousness and the Modernist space are directly intertwined. Friedrich Engels recognised this as early as 1845; for him the inhabitants of the city "crowd by one another as though they had nothing in common, nothing to do with one another, and their only agreement is the tacit one, that each keep to his own side of the pavement, so as not to delay the opposing stream of the crowd, while it occurs to no man to honour another with so much as a glance" (Engels 69). As Randall Stevenson puts it, writing on the twentieth-century novel, "the English landscape ceases to seem open, or a liberation of the soul, but crowded and restricting instead" (79). However, the city is also vibrant, exciting and instructive, "the place where the pulse of life is most strongly felt" (Pike 7). It is the "Unreal City" of Eliot's *The Waste Land* or the mechanised dystopia of Lang's *Metropolis* but it is also the revolutionary space of the Communists and a place of aesthetic beauty already glimpsed by Baudelaire and made a practical possibility by Le Corbusier. This inherent contradiction produces a complex image of the cityscape. It could be either/both a site of loss and despair, or/and a place of potential and dynamism. Due to the direct correlation between the Modernist mind and the Modernist location, the city is not purely an ambiguous geographical space, a backdrop for human action. It is, as Jane Augustine suggests, "less a *topos* and more anthropoid—'man-like', 'resembling the human being', more organic and seemingly capable of choice" (Cows 74).

The city of Salford is just such a complex image for MacColl and in his work: a dialectical site in an aesthetic focusing on contemporary society and the urban space. In *Landscape with Chimneys* the Stage Manager's narrations are consistently governed by the appearance or attributes of the town. The Stage Manager's city is anthropomorphic, a constant, often overwhelming presence. Indeed, the human characteristics of the street are referred to explicitly at times:

And now the night falls over the street, the spring night wearing the quartered moon as a young girl might wear her lover's token of a youth his first wristlet watch, one with a luminous dial (17).

MacColl's city is a living body, impinging on the lives of the occupants just as one individual may have an effect on another in general human interaction. It is a constant, multifaceted and often looming presence.

This presentation of the anthropomorphic cityscape as both dynamic and bleak is noticeable throughout MacColl's commentaries and plays. On the one hand he consistently reminisces about the sense of community; for instance, the Hogmanay parties of his childhood dominate the opening pages of his autobiography.²² From the "continuous procession of street performers" (MacColl, *Journeyman* 53) to debating politics with his father (31), his Salford upbringing marked a particularly formative period. In a BBC documentary he acknowledges the seminal impact of the northern city reflecting that "Salford was my Paris" (*Rhythms of the World: the Ballad of Ewan MacColl*): a place of political and artistic education just as the French metropolis had been for Baudelaire. In the urban landscape MacColl could observe the entirety of human experience. Walter Benjamin in his reminiscences of his own childhood in Berlin reveals that, "I have long, indeed for years played with the idea of setting out the sphere of life biosgraphically on a map. First I envisaged an ordinary map, but now I would incline to a general staff's map²³ of a city centre" (Benjamin, *One Way Street* 295) and his focus on the cityscape as a concretised image of all human experience is reflected in MacColl's plays and reminiscences. In the opening to *Landscape with Chimneys* the Stage Manager informs the audience that "we have about two and a half hours in which to think about love, death, happiness, dream, birth, war, peace, courage, despair and several other aspects of human behaviours" (3). The city embraces the complete blend of human experience; as the Narrator declares in *Johnny Noble*, "the world is here" (36).

However, Manchester-Salford is also a place of overcrowding, poor living conditions and desperation. MacColl's relationship with his birthplace was complex: "of course I hate it, I loathe it, I am scared of being devoured by it; and yet though I live to be a hundred, it is unlikely that I will ever come to know a place like I know this one" (MacColl, *Journeyman* 181). Despite his professed hatred for

²² There are some unpublished 'Salford' chapters of his autobiography in the Ruskin College Library, Oxford. They were omitted by the editors as they concluded that if included the book would focus too heavily upon Salford and become unbalanced (in conversation with Peggy Seeger 7/4/06).

²³ A 'general staff's map' is presumably a map for the General Staff, an important organising institution, first for the Prussian army and, later, for the German forces. In all likelihood such a map would be intricate, detailed and accurate. Perhaps this is the image Benjamin envisaging.

Salford he remains curiously drawn to it and he returns to this contradictory experience of the cityscape in his 1957 song *Northern City*:

Turned my back on you one morning
Sailed away across the sea
Left your judies and your streets behind me
Now I hear them calling me. (MacColl, *Essential Songbook* 43)

This complex presentation of the cityscape is equally present in the Second *Manifesto of Theatre Union* in which MacColl and the company write “it has been said that every society has the theatre it deserves; if that is so, then Manchester, one of the greatest industrial and commercial centres in the world, deserves the best” (Goorney 25). In spite of his innate aspiration to escape the northern city, there is also a sense of pride in the urban landscape that bore him.

Landscape with Chimneys presents both aspects of this dichotomy; the city embodies subjugation, unregulated Capitalist growth, a gradual erosion of hope and a suppression of individual identity; it also denotes a sense of community, unity and, eventually, revolutionary potential. In a sense MacColl was fortunate to hail from the Manchester-Salford area²⁴ as it had often been a site of critical examination most noticeably in Friedrich Engels’ illuminating description of the northern city in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. MacColl cites this Communist critique of the British city as particularly influential in his own thinking. Indeed, he reveals that “Engels’ book became our Baedeker to the city” and that “we felt a strong kinship with Friedrich”²⁵ (MacColl, *Journeyman* 183). Engels recognised that the Manchester-Salford cityscape provided a pertinent example of the archetypal British industrial city:

The effects of modern manufacture upon the working class must necessarily develop here most freely and perfectly, and the manufacturing proletariat present itself in its fullest class perfection (82-3).

According to Engels, the pervasive effects of capitalist expansion could be seen throughout this metropolitan area. Beginning with the working-class areas of central Manchester, which were predominantly hidden from the sensitive bourgeois travellers (85), Engels endeavours to present an accurate impression of proletariat existence in the north of England’s largest city space. He describes the Manchester

²⁴ Interestingly, Salford was a recurrent motif in Theatre Workshop’s productions. In May 1958, the company presented Shelagh Delaney’s *A Taste of Honey*, a masterfully insightful work about the experiences of a mother and daughter in Salford.

²⁵ MacColl also claims that “Engels was ours, he was a buddy, a mate” (*Rhythms of the World: the Ballad of Ewan MacColl*).

localities as grim, polluted and categorised by poor buildings, sickness and demoralisation. Like the Baedeker to which MacColl refers, Engels' narrative traverses the labyrinthine streets of the city and its adjacent towns. Each area has its own unique characteristics but all contain similar examples of industrial development and its consequences. Stockport is revealed as "one of the duskiest, smokiest holes, and looks, indeed, especially when viewed from the viaduct, excessively repellent" (84); Little Ireland has an "atmosphere [that] is poisoned by the effluvia from these [standing, filthy puddles], and laden and darkened by the smoke of a dozen tall factory chimneys" (98). Salford specifically is described as "an old and therefore very unwholesome, dirty, and ruinous locality (99).

Evidently Engels compiled his survey in 1845. There were undoubtedly improvements made to the standard of housing and environmental quality during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries²⁶, but comparable conditions remained prevalent in Manchester-Salford during the period of MacColl's own childhood as other writers make clear. In his autobiographical description of his Manchester upbringing, Robert Roberts, writing of the period up to the outbreak of the First World War, states that "in among the respectable rows of 'two up and two down' houses we had the same blocks of hovels sharing a single tap, earth closet and open midden" (Roberts 75). J.B. Priestley, in his study of the British landscape in 1933 entitled *English Journey*, visited Manchester and the surrounding environs and recalls that "there used to be a grim Lancashire adage: 'where there's muck, there's money'. But now, he comments, where there is not much money, there is still a lot of muck" (262). He also refers to the Greater Manchester area as "all these hideous towns...towns meant to work in and not really to live" (274). It was this image of the industrial northern city that MacColl sought to reflect in *Landscape with Chimneys*. Like Engels, he undertook to evaluate the effects of rapid industrialisation and the significance of these developments for the working class.

²⁶ Historians have taken differing views about the developments in housing and environment in Manchester and Salford during this period. Charles P. Hampson writing in 1930 recalls that "noisome cellar dwellings and filthy privies have been abolished; vast street improvements involving the demolition of the worst slums in the older part of the city have been carried out" (290). This is not, however, corroborated by MacColl and many of his contemporaries who cite the continuation of the appalling working-class living conditions. Keith Laybourn points to the disparities between working-class and middle-class experience during the 1930s, stating that "the pace of development was uneven between social classes, and it was the middle class, rather than the working class who received the major benefits of new housing during the inter-war years (79). Suffice to say that developments in living conditions were inconsistent and did not impact upon all spheres of the cityscape.

It is a very specific realism centring on the inextricable connection between the city, its industry, and the working class who labour there and inhabit it.

In *Landscape with Chimneys* the street is presented from the outset as dominated by the industrial vestiges that surround it. In the opening conversation between the Stage Manager, the Electrician and the Sound Engineer, MacColl points to the effect of industry on both the substandard air quality and the noise pollution (2). The Stage Manager, an on-stage character in *Landscape with Chimneys*, goes on to describe the Salford street as “consisting of two long lines of houses which stare blankly at each other across two ribbons of pavement and a strip of cobbles. The brick fronts were red but a hundred years of heavy industry has altered their complexion to dirty grey, mottled here and there with patches of black and brown” (3). This particular image of industrial grime and architectural uniformity is utilised frequently in MacColl’s writing. It appears most noticeably in *The Damnable Town*, in which he cites “two rectangular blocks of solid brick buildings separated from each other by a strip of paving stone and cobbled earth” (38). The image remains prominent in his autobiographical description of his own birthplace in *Journeyman* in which he remembers that “each half of the street consisted of two rows of terraced houses, facing each other across two strips of pavement” (41). The consistent repetition of this illustration would suggest that it was extremely instrumental both to MacColl’s own perception of his birthplace and, in conjunction, to the plays his experiences engendered. Once again, *Landscape with Chimneys*’ semi-autobiographical²⁷ nature is revealed. According to the Stage

²⁷ Just as his portrayal of the Manchester-Salford locality reflects his own experience of the area, his inclusion of certain characters has an equally autobiographical tenor. His plays contain a number of figures that impacted upon MacColl during his residency in Manchester-Salford. In his novel, *The Damnable Town*, for example, he includes a character named Armit. During the early days of Red Megaphones, Alf Armit was the company’s Adolphe Appia specialist (Goorney and MacColl xxxi). This may be purely coincidental but MacColl does have a tendency to introduce characters based on figures from his own life. This is particularly noticeable in his inclusion of a character named Hugh Graham in *Landscape with Chimneys*, as an individual by the same name was a protestor during the Bexley Square riot. Ruth and Eddie Frow include a biography of Hugh Graham in their historical account, *The Communist Party of Great Britain* (59). They also mention him in their account of the Battle of Bexley Square: “On 1st October, his [Hugh Graham’s] wife helped him into the big drum harness and he then kept the marching step throughout the demonstration” (12). MacColl refers to Hugh Graham (Graeme) in his autobiography *Journeyman* and includes a humorous story about landing his drum on a policeman’s head during the Bexley Square riot (196). MacColl also includes characters called Alec, Lazar and Myer in *Rogue’s Gallery* (1947). His autobiography suggests that these were the names of real acquaintances (MacColl, *Journeyman* 391). There is also a marked resemblance between MacColl and his two central protagonists, Martin in *The Damnable Town* and Ginger in *Landscape with Chimneys*. With their preoccupation with poetry and their earnest aspiration to escape from a future confined to hard labour and poor conditions, “it is not, it cannot be possible for him to travel the same empty road” (MacColl, *The*

Manager, the city is a place where “above the street one sees a slag heap rising like a miniature volcano or a gigantic burial mound, according to your fancy. Or if not a slag heap there are the tall cranes and derricks of the docks, looking like steletoidal stegosaurous [sic] or monstrous gallows according to your fancy” (3). This extract denotes both homogeneity and diversity. Not every urban landscape is exactly analogous and MacColl provides his audience with an image of their own experience through his play asking each individual to construct a conception ‘according to your fancy’. However, the scene also has a sense of universality; the specific industries differ from place to place, but the atmosphere will still be polluted, the housing will still be insufficient, and early death (‘gigantic burial mound’, ‘monstrous gallows’) will still be engendered by these trappings of capitalism. Lewis Mumford in his reassessment of the cityscape, *The Culture of Cities*, notes that the building of industrial cities was rapid and inadequately considered; such an evaluation is useful in analysing the urban landscape as presented in *Landscape with Chimneys*:

In the layout no thought was given whether to the direction of the prevailing winds, the placing of industrial districts, the salubrity of the underlying foundations, or any of the other vital factors involved in the proper utilization of a site. Hence there was no functional differentiation on the plan between the industrial, the commercial, the civic and the residential quarters (185).

The construction of the urban space, as the Stage Manager recognises, combines industry and the residential together. In the company’s early play *Classic Soil*, written by Littlewood for radio in 1939 and later adapted for the stage in 1942 (Harker, *Was there another England?* 39-40), which narrates the experience of the revolting factory workers in Lancashire during the nineteenth century and the foundation of the Chartist movement, the Actor asserts that, “progress was on the march and four fifths of the population lived in cellars” (Goorney 35). It is not surprising that the pollutants and the unattractive trappings of industrial expansion dominate the street of *Landscape with Chimneys*.

In his paintings, fellow resident of the northern cityscape, L.S. Lowry²⁸ presents the northern city in a similar manner and his work provides a useful visual

Damnable Town 35). Much of this is just circumstantial evidence but it does perhaps point to the autobiographical nature of much of MacColl’s writing, and thereby its profound and sustained connection with the authentic material circumstances of his ‘own people’.

²⁸ Lowry was not the only painter in Manchester during this period. Indeed, Howard Goorney writes, “The Hallè orchestra was flourishing; L.S. Lowry, Emmanuel Levy and Eric Newton were painting, and The Manchester Guardian boasted contributors like Malcolm Muggeridge, Neville Cardus and Donald Boyd” (Goorney 6).

elucidation of the images in MacColl's play²⁹. Interestingly Lowry's interest in the industrial scene that surrounded him seems to have originated in his attendance at a performance of Stanley Haughton's *Hindle Wakes* at the Gaiety Theatre in 1912 (Andrews 40); his artistic development was therefore indebted to the theatre. Just as MacColl determined to create a dramatic image of urban existence, Lowry crafted visual representations of Lancashire and the cities that dominated it:

My ambition was to put the industrial scene on the map because nobody had done it, nobody had done it seriously (Howard 81).

Further, like MacColl he exhibited a certain complex relationship with the city. As Allen Andrews puts it "although increasingly with age, he moaned at the rain and gloom of the North, that overcast North of England was something he could not leave" (Andrews 55). Although Lowry painted other subjects (the sea, the country landscape), he is predominantly remembered for his vivid depictions of the urban. And as MacColl does in *Landscape with Chimneys*, Lowry predicates the inextricable connection between the residential and the industrial. Just as the inhabitants of the street in the play are accustomed to the polluted air and the perpetually noisy factories, Lowry's landscapes present the workers' houses and the industry that joins the occupants to the area as indistinguishable. In his 1958 *Industrial Landscape* (Levy plate 125), for instance he includes the worker's dwellings, churches, the river, the factories, the obligatory chimneys and great swaths of wasteland as representative of a complex accumulation, rather than any sort of harmonisation of buildings, purposes and population. His city is not a homogenous area but, as Kevin Lynch suggests, "a multi-purpose, shifting organization, a tent for many functions" (Lynch 91). MacColl would surely have been sympathetic to this view. Indeed, in entitling his theatrical presentations of the cityscape *Portrait of a Salford Street* and *Landscape with Chimneys*, MacColl is consciously aligning his work with the visual arts. Like Lowry, he is primarily concerned with the presentation of an image of the city that is often disregarded or wilfully ignored. As Baudelaire says "the life of the city is rich in poetic and marvellous subjects. We are enveloped and steeped as though in an atmosphere of the marvellous; but we do not notice it" (Baudelaire, *Art in Paris* 119.) MacColl's stage often resembles a canvas on which to 'paint' a recognisable, authentic image

²⁹ There are of course significant differences between MacColl and Lowry. MacColl was staunchly working class whereas Lowry was from a middle-class background. However, Lowry did live in Pendlebury, Salford from 1909 (Andrews 39) in close proximity to MacColl's own birthplace. They also worked alongside one another during the early years of Theatre Union. Lowry offered to help with the company's production of Lope de Vega's *Fuenteovejuna* (Goorney 17)

of the cityscape. Baudelaire further refers to “a genre which I can only call the landscape of great cities” (Baudelaire, *Art in Paris* 200). Despite working in different artistic modes, Lowry and MacColl can both be seen as working in this genre. However, their “landscape of great cities” is not the “collection of grandeur and beauties” (ibid) of Baudelaire, but the docks, factories and slum housing of actual twentieth-century existence.

MacColl is not unique in his presentation of this cityscape through the theatrical medium, as we have seen. Indeed Walter Greenwood’s dramatic adaptation of his novel *Love on the Dole*³⁰ imparts a similar image. Like *Landscape with Chimneys*, it is based in Salford. It opens with an offstage speaker addressing a crowd:

Labour is never ending, pawnshops, misery and dirt. No time for anything bright and beautiful. Grey, depressing streets, mile after mile of them (119).

There is a marked similarity between MacColl and Greenwood’s descriptions of the Salford street. Both playwrights indicate the uniformity of colour and design. The city is a site of conflict between the evident traces of industrial activities (the chimneys, the pollutants and the utilitarian architecture) and the working-class residential area. Later, in conversation with Sally, Larry Meath, the speaker of the opening scene and political activist of the piece, evokes the “dirt and the smoke and the foul ugliness of it all” (Greenwood 123). In both plays the city remains a “jungle of decaying brick” (MacColl 27), a place of “poverty and pawnshops and dirt and drink” (Greenwood 145).

Although MacColl’s depiction of the city in *Landscape with Chimneys* reveals the devastation of unbounded industrial expansion and the disintegration of working class living space, he remains captivated and inspired by it. This contradictory representation of the city space is epitomised by Ginger’s famous song *Dirty Old Town*:

I found my love on the gasworks croft,
Dreamed a dream by the old canal,
Kissed my girl by the factory wall.
Dirty old town, dirty old town (70).

As his title suggests Greenwood reveals a similar connection between the decayed metropolis and romantic love in the relationship between Larry and Sally in the

³⁰ Just as MacColl attempted a novelistic version of *Landscape with Chimneys*, *Love on the Dole* also began as a piece of prose fiction.

novel version of *Love on the Dole*, where “on this dunghill of Hanky Park a rose was blowing for him [Larry]” (151). In MacColl’s song the dirty old town and the industrial symbols of the factory wall, the canal and the croft become inextricably connected with a love affair. In spite of the conditions, the poor housing, the polluted street, MacColl’s characters retain the ability to love. The industrial city has the potential to be a romantic backdrop; genres of industrial folksong and romantic ballad combine.

In addition to cityscape as romantic backdrop, MacColl also regards the streets as formative in the educational process of the inhabitants. Indeed, he reflects that during his own childhood “the place to be was out on the streets where the workers gathered to protest against their conditions of living and where the day to day struggles were being fought” (Goorney 1). He also recognises the streets as a place of instruction in *Portrait of a Salford Street*. The narrator tells Ginger that “the street is yours, lad. It is the crucible which moulded you, it has taught you all you know about life and work and love and death. It has furnished you with the raw materials for matchless poems and deathless songs” (42). This theme of opportunity and creativity is retained in *Landscape with Chimneys* when the Stage Manager refers to the marked transformation of the street by night:

And the street is no longer a rigid line of houses but a world of shadows where imagination flowers (17).

A similar sentiment is expounded by Chris in MacColl’s later play *The Long Winter*, written after his split with Theatre Workshop in 1952 (Leach, *Theatre Workshop* 70), which considers the damaging impact of the Second World War. Chris is a soldier on leave returning to his city, a place that, through his descriptions of it with the “thousand factories” and the impoverished working class (29) consistently resembles the Manchester of *The Damnable Town* or *Landscape with Chimneys*. As he walks around the cityscape he observes the innate musicality of the city suggesting that “it’s more a question of feeling, of responding to the rhythm of the place” (28). He does not regard the city as beautiful or admirable, but he does, as MacColl himself does, recognise the educative function of the urban space. He reflects that “the town became, for me, the microcosm of the entire world” (30). Such a cityspace has become for Chris, as it did for MacColl, a place that created “a social conscience in me and convinced me that I couldn’t escape alone (30). Chris always views the urban space as “a great city, powerful even in its decay” (29) and it is this image of hopeless destitution on the one hand and potential political transformation on the other that defines MacColl’s cityscape. His complex

relationship with the urban space is markedly reflected in his characters; the metropolis is a polluted space, detrimental to health and mental wellbeing, but it is also a site of instruction, of the acquisition of knowledge and the discovery of political and creative thought. Indeed, according to MacColl, "life was in the street itself" (Orr and O'Rourke Part Two). Though he sought escape, he remains inextricably associated with Manchester-Salford: something now literally concretised in the commemoration plaque at the Working Class Movement Library at the Crescent in Salford.

iv "Your own people" the urban working class

Landscape with Chimneys provides a revealing image of the cityscape; the street is, as we have seen, an anthropomorphised space, a character interacting almost independently with the actors. However, MacColl is also preoccupied with the occupants of the urban space, and the characters of his realism consistently reveal their working-class origins. Indeed, "Ewan MacColl's is virtually the only drama in English that puts twentieth-century British working-class's experience at its centre (Leach, *Theatre Workshop* 77). Although this statement could cause some dispute, it does reflect the importance of MacColl's work in relation to the artistic presentation of that class. As his plays demonstrate, the inextricable connection between the industrial and the residential in the urban space, the inhabitants of the city become subjects of artistic consideration.

The urban landscape and the working class, a group inextricably connected with this space, remains MacColl's primary focus throughout his theatrical canon. Conventional theatrical productions before the 1960s (outside the work of mavericks such as DH Lawrence or Sean O'Casey) generally restricted the working class to comedy or servitude. The poet Tony Harrison, reflecting on his own experience as a working-class child reading plays at school recalls that "I played the Drunken Porter in *Macbeth*" (122), and Joan Littlewood's early experience of reparatory theatre in Manchester was confined to brief, walk on parts like "Daisy, the consumptive serving maid" (Harker, *Was there another England?* 36). In addition, according to Theatre Workshop, traditional theatre was a bastion of bourgeois society. MacColl notes that the statistical bureau, the St James' League of Audiences, suggested that only 5% of the population had ever been inside a

theatre building (MacColl, *Grassroots* 62)³¹. MacColl's theatre, by contrast, sought to provide an arena to both represent authentic working-class existence and to address his 'own people', involving them in socio-political and economic debates.

According to Marx, capitalism has produced a class of labourers, a group of human commodities indistinguishable in the eyes of the property owners from the materials they work with (Marx, *Communist Manifesto* 61). MacColl's 'Baedeker' contains a similar sentiment:

The worker is, in law and in fact, the slave of the property-holding class, so effectually a slave that he is sold like a piece of goods, rises and falls in value like a commodity (Engels 144).

In *Landscape with Chimneys* MacColl aspires to address the actual conditions of the working class, to describe the habitations, to 'de-commodify', to confront the inequalities in the capitalist class-based society. And the collection of characters in it and in one of his other quasi-naturalistic plays, *Johnny Noble*, with its dockers shipbuilders and miners, reveals authentic working-class experience. He constantly reveals an awareness of the everyday concerns of the working class in the northern cityspace. As Robert Roberts' twentieth-century perspective on the Salford cityscape recalls "the tragedy was that in the most opulent country in the world so many possessed so little" (41). An insightful account from MacColl's mother suggests that his family, too, endured the low wages and job instability recorded by Engels and Roberts. Betsy Miller asserts, "it was a struggle. I've seen me so tired I couldn't lift my arms up in the morning" (Gray 115). Working as a cleaning lady she recognised the undeniable difference between the affluent houses she cleaned and her own home in inner city Salford:

Luxury in every corner. I used to look round and think about what I had got to go home to (Gray 116).

But beyond his own intimate familiarity with authentic working-class circumstances MacColl also includes an eclectic collection of characters to reveal something about working-class existence generally and the distinctive, personal experiences of a range of individuals.

³¹ The League of Audiences was set up in the 1930s to, according to a 1937 letter to the Musical Times by the organising secretary Alfred Wareing "increase contacts with sensitive audiences" (355). The League perceived the importance of the audience in the study of theatre for "machinery never gave life to anything; the vital spark can only be struck in contact with audiences" and that "masterpieces are not inspired by money; they are born of the contact between living artists and responsive audiences" (355).

In *Landscape with Chimneys*, his primary characters are almost without exception of working-class origin.³² Their everyday existence is determined by the factories, docks and mills the Stage Manager indicates in the opening scene. The emblems of industrial expansion are inescapable. Life is timed by typical industrial noises, the “factory hooter” (28), the dock siren (17) the machines in action (30). The worker’s lives are determined hour by hour by the industry with which they are so associated. For MacColl, time and work are inextricably linked, and this theme is evident throughout his and indeed Theatre Workshop’s work. The Young Woman’s impassioned speech in *Classic Soil* reveals the intrinsic pervasiveness of industrial noise:

Work, work, work. Oh God, the noise of the hand-loom is driving me mad. It’s making an old woman out of me. It’s killing me Luke, I can’t stand it. Will there ever be time when we can sit back and rest for half an hour, or when the dry wood-clacking of the loom won’t fill the house? (Goorney 34).

Her description contains perceptible images of time as controlled by the industrial context. The noise is transforming her into an old woman; her youth is eroded by the trappings of the urban landscape. Even her leisure time is adversely affected by the noise and the home becomes an extension of the factory rather than a sphere of domesticity, rest and fellowship with family and friends. The control of time as a method of repression is also profoundly manifest in *The Damnable Town*, in which MacColl writes, “years of experience have taught the body and ear that the clock’s alarm represents the factory, food, clothing, all the fundamentals of existence” (1), so that “time is measured in periods of attendance on the machine and periods of preparation for attending the machine” (182). Time is no longer a metaphysical concept allowing humanity to organise its existence; it is instead a structure for subjugation and a method of increasing industrial production.

If MacColl’s characters are not labouring, “condemned to let...[their] physical and mental powers decay in this utter monotony” (Engels 192) whilst earning a wage that reduces them to a hand-to-mouth existence, they are experiencing the extreme poverty and profound instability of unemployment. Wal

³² The anomaly here is the character of Professor who is, according to the stage notes, “the relic of a poor medical student who did a twelve month stretch for performing an abortion” (10). Interestingly it is the Professor, the sole representative of the middle class, who questions the wisdom of confronting ‘real’ issues (specifically Trudi’s suicide) upon the stage (55).

Hannington³³, instrumental in the labour movements in the 1930s, provides a distressing picture of unemployment:

But it is not only in malnutrition and ill health that unemployment leaves its mark: it rends the whole fabric of social well-being, and dashes to the ground the natural hopes and desires of the people for a useful and well-ordered life (Hannington, *Ten Lean Years* 270).

MacColl knew from his own personal experience of joblessness that “there is a special kind of shame, a quite unreasonable shame, about being unemployed” (MacColl, *Journeyman* 133); and where *Landscape with Chimneys* focuses on an active working class, *Johnny Noble* addresses an earlier period in twentieth-century labour history which was characterised by unemployment and the perpetual search for work:

Yes, we speak of days that linger in the memory like a bad taste in the mouth. Come back with us a dozen years or so, back to the early thirties, to the derelict towns and the idle hands, the rusting lathes and the silent turbines (36).

The play begins in a seaside town dependent upon the declining fishing industry. It recounts the protagonist Johnny’s search for stable employment. The characters that Johnny encounters all reveal the gradual degeneration of all areas of industrial labour, from the shipbuilding industry of the Clyde where a worker reveals that “it’s a lost trade chum” (46) to the mining pits of Durham where “there’s not enough work to keep three men and a boy busy” (47). MacColl wasn’t entirely isolated in addressing these issues as Greenwood too presents the disintegration of industrial Britain in *Love on the Dole*. Like MacColl he contemplates the profound effect of such economic collapse on the working class. Harry, reminiscent of the young MacColl, declares that “I’m ashamed to walk the streets. I feel they’re all watching me. I’ve been to twenty places this morning and it’s the same blasted story all the time. ‘No hands wanted’...just get me a job. I don’t care if it’s only half-pay, but give me something” (171). The 1930s period endured the disappearance of the trades that had once been the foundation of British commercial growth; “the staple industries had been highly concentrated, and where they were...depression and chronic unemployment settled over towns and people” (Mowat 259).

Unsurprisingly the characters in *Landscape with Chimneys* become preoccupied with methods of escape and emancipation. The street and its environs

³³ Ewan MacColl and Wal Hannington actually met while the former was touring with A.L. Lloyd (MacColl, *Journeyman* 272).

provide few prospects, and as the play progresses the theme of incarceration intensifies. While Hugh unsuccessfully searches for a house, Clare recognises the street as a place of imprisonment: "I'm turning twenty-six and I'm still living in the street I was born in" (48). Ginger acknowledges a similar predicament in his final speech: "wherever I was it would chain me to here, bind me to the endless desert and the poisoned air" (70). Neither Ginger nor Clare can discern a way of escaping physically from the Salford street. Mental escape is however a possibility and often takes the form of dreams. Jessie imagines becoming a film star (29), Shaunnessey creates a fanciful story about a beautiful girl he met in Venezuela (45) and Swindels visualizes the possibility of winning the pools (50). However, all these fantasies are abruptly interrupted, so that even mental escape becomes unattainable. MacColl's characters also attempt to locate escape in the form of trivial entertainment. As Charles Mowat suggests that "to the large majority unemployment meant apathy...life was, in fact, sustained by the weekly round of existence in cheap luxuries, by the excitement of small bets" (485). From Swindels' preoccupation with the football pools, to the gambler's small bets in *Johnny Noble* (38), MacColl interpolates characters who reflect an inherent dissatisfaction with the mundane nature of working-class existence and a perpetual searching for trivial pleasure. Neither the pools nor Hollywood fantasies can really provide genuine escape.

Indeed the only method of escape from Salford in this play is through war; Hugh and Frank are the only two characters to successfully leave the northern city and war is understandably a recurring theme in his plays, writing as he does, during a period of particular political instability and the ongoing threat of military confrontation; the playwright's experiences dictate his choice of theme. However, MacColl rarely focuses on the political leaders or generals; he maintains his preoccupation with a specifically working-class realism. *Landscape with Chimneys* presents the return of Frank and Hugh from the Second World War and their problematic transition back into the Salford community. Part Two of *Classic Soil* presents Chris, who has just received his call-up papers, and his lover Julie. Their final farewell is punctuated by the sound of an air raid (Goorney 36). *Johnny Noble* narrates the effect of the war on the protagonist and visually portrays an attack by his ship on a group of Nazi planes (62). *The Long Winter* dramatises the destructive consequences of war eventually, concluding that civilian murder is a potential result of the lack of respect for life that war engenders. However, it is his 1952 play *The Travellers* that best displays the genuine effects of war. Set on a train, it exhibits a collection of individuals who have all experienced war in differing ways from

Maillard, who was blinded by a Nazi general, to Kari, who was forced into prostitution in a concentration camp. The passengers do not know the destination of the train but it is slowly revealed that each of the individuals is going to work, in some capacity, on a new project. Literally they journey towards a job and financial security; symbolically they accelerate towards another war. However, MacColl focuses on the impact such a conflict will have on the working class. Mehring, an impostor who boards the train in secret to warn the passengers, informs them of his previous journeys on this train in 1919 and 1939, both of which were “very serious, particularly for third class passengers” (57). The character of Mrs Foster in *Landscape with Chimneys* embodies the consequences of war on a ‘third class passenger’. Having lost her husband and her two sons, she wanders the street in a state of perpetual hate and psychological anguish. Swindels recognises the direct correlation between her current circumstances and the war, suggesting that “she used to be a real smart woman. Everything had to be just so in that house. And she thought the world of those two lads. Well that’s war” (9). As Mehring suggests, conflict contains incomparable dangers for those compelled to fight at the front line.³⁴ War, while unequivocally detrimental for the working class remains the only way that individuals such as Hugh and Frank are able to leave the street. MacColl addresses this in his 1948 song *The Trafford Road Ballad* in which he writes, “I’ve never been out of Salford town the place where I was born/ Except when I was in the ranks and wore a uniform” (MacColl, *Essential Songbook* 296). The stark choice available to MacColl’s characters is between war and escape, and peace and incarceration.

However, like his complex depiction of the cityscape, MacColl’s presentation of working-class identity and experience is not uniformly negative. His plays are punctuated with references to impoverishment, disillusionment and subjugation, yet MacColl indicates that life on the Salford street is also characterised by community. This is exemplified in the opening sequence of *Landscape with Chimneys*. The return of Hugh and Frank is marked by a gathering of all the characters and mention of a celebration in their honour which Shaunnessey refers to as “just a few friends gathered together” (15). The final scene narrates the birth of Hugh and Clare’s baby and their illegal occupation of an empty house. As

³⁴ MacColl’s critique of war is particularly noticeable in *Uranium 235*, which will be discussed in the second half of this chapter and in Chapter Three, and his adaptation of *Lysistrata*, *Operation Olive Branch* (discussed fully in Chapter Four) in which he states that “a soldier’s just about the most crazy thing in life, the lowest of all things that walk; he’s even lower than a flea. His only purpose in life is to provide dinners for worms” (33).

the police come to evict the couple, the other characters unite to protect them.

Ginger presents the call to arms:

Everybody on the job, the cops are coming!

Frank! Docker! Mike! The cops are on the way to evict Hughie Graham.

Everybody out on the Street! (67)

Due to connections of geography and labour the characters in *Landscape with Chimneys* consistently reveal a sense of community. Certainly this is not to pronounce a working-class homogeneity; as Davies and Fielding suggest “gender, generation and ethnicity all structured the experience of the traditional working class” (18) and this is markedly revealed in MacColl’s plays. *Landscape with Chimneys* contains a variety of different often conflicting characters and yet there ultimately remains a sense of unity. MacColl’s work is given particular illumination by his social environment and by the work of his contemporaries. One such contemporary, Richard Hoggart³⁵, discerns the primary explanation for this bond in the working class of the period as a whole:

The friendly group tradition seems to me to have its strength initially from the ever-present evidence, in the close, huddled, intimate conditions of life, that we are, in fact, all in the same position (60).

Unity therefore occurs at first simply because of geographical necessity. This is particularly evident in *Landscape with Chimneys*. Interaction between the characters develops because of their close physical proximity to one another. However, the characters are also united by the *consequences* of living in the street, by economic necessity, by the need to support and assist one another. As MacColl himself states, “you had to develop a sense of community, you had to develop loyalties, otherwise you just didn’t survive” (Samuel et al. 211).

This sense of community, loyalty and allegiance is created through the production of myths, stories that define a society. MacColl’s characters produce their own working-class narrative distinct from the historical accounts of other groups. The urban locality and the individuals inhabiting it produce myth. This is an idea readily associated with country life but perhaps less so with the cityscape and its occupants; however, Raymond Williams suggests that “these urban ways and objects seem to have...the same real emotional substance as the brooks, commons, hedges, cottages, festivals of the rural scene” (Williams, *City and Country* 297).

³⁵ MacColl met Richard Hoggart when the latter was working on a BBC radio project with folk song collector Alan Lomax. MacColl joined them to sing some ballad music for the show (Woods, *Folk Review* June 1973 6).

This collective myth making³⁶ is exemplified in the opening scene of *Landscape with Chimneys* during the preparation for the soldiers' return. The common memories are linguistically concretised in writing on the walls; as Swindels reflects, "wonderful stuff, bluemould. I remember some young chaps chalking strike notices on the wall of Tillings Dock in 1933. Thirteen years ago, and you can still read it" (6). A similar image appears in *The Damnable Town*, in which the slogans on the wall remain after the Means Test demonstration (139). In *Landscape with Chimneys* Ginger inscribes a new sign upon the wall, "welcome to our brave lads Hugh and Frank 1946", and affirms that "this won't rub out so easily. I've got bluemould" (6). Ginger is adding his own and the collective street memory to the wall. The event will be linguistically immortalised, a reminder of the collective myth.

Ginger's inscription also produces a sense of territorial ownership. Such an assertion of territory reveals a declaration of subjectivity, an affirmation of rights. As David Storey writes in his text detailing the different types of territorial spaces from a political geography perspective, "territory can play an important role in the formation of people's self-identity" (7). In essence *Landscape with Chimneys* is a play which primarily brings together the dual themes of personal ownership and collective territoriality. The play narrates Hugh's search to acquire property, a space in which to assert possession. Hugh's stance, "I want a place I can call my own" (33), equates with Storey's notion that "people, through possession of their own home, can be said to be saying 'this is my territory'" (169). The conclusion of the play recounts the collective assertion of territoriality by the inhabitants of the street. Hugh and Clare's occupation of the empty property provokes a reaction from the police. All the characters unite in singing *Which Side are you On?*³⁷, a song that affirms both the need for working-class unity and retention of working class space:

Don't listen to the landlords
 Don't listen to their lies
 There ain't no hope for us poor folk
 Unless we organise

³⁶ This theme will be examined further in the chapter on the folk movement and in the discussion of MacColl's urban industrialised songs and Pace-Egging plays.

³⁷ This song is adapted from the original and MacColl changes the words slightly in order to create an applicable song for his play. The original was written in 1931 by Florence Reese in response to the miners strike in Kentucky. It was adopted by the politicised folk movement as a song of protest.

Which side are you on? (68)

Storey expands his argument by stating that “territory, and the assertion of control over it, represents an expression of power: we control this space” (14). This declaration of ownership is vital for the characters in *Landscape with Chimneys*. It provides them with a method of asserting identity and possession. As Engels reflects, “these workers have no property of their own, and live wholly upon wages, which usually go hand to mouth” (108). Identity is asserted through a collective affirmation of territory.

Working-class unity is not just engendered by geographical necessity but also by an innate sense of what Richard Hoggart refers to as the belief in the dichotomies of ‘Them and Us’. According to Hoggart, “the world of ‘Them’ is the world of the bosses” (53). ‘Us’ by contrast provides the working class with a collective oppositional identity. Indeed, Tony Harrison entitles a poem dedicated to Hoggart ‘Them & [uz]’. Harrison describes the distinction between ‘them’ (specifically the teachers at his grammar school) and ‘[uz]’ (the working class children) through linguistic difference:

I chewed up Littererchewer and spat the bones
into the lap of dozing Daniel Jones,
dropped the initials I’d been harried as
and used my *name* and own voice: [uz] [uz] [uz] (123)

MacColl’s plays dramatise a similar contrast between ‘Them’ and ‘[uz]’, his “own people” (Samuel et al. 238). In the plays ‘Them’ is the police and factory owners in *Landscape with Chimneys* or the senate leaders in *Operation Olive Branch* or Todt and Baldwin in *Hell is What you Make it* or the rich occupants of the house in *Rogue’s Gallery*. ‘Us’ is always miners, factory workers, unemployed dock labourers, soldiers. It is this dichotomy that impacts each of MacColl’s plays and provides the key to complete understanding. Marx asserts that “the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of the class struggle” (55) and MacColl’s drama consistently maintains this as a focus. He does not only present urban life and working-class experience, he attempts to directly shape the political landscape. Engels affirms that “the proletarians, driven to despair, will seize the torch which none hitherto known can be compared” (291). MacColl’s intense preoccupation with the disclosure of genuine working-class experience is to aid this process. Shown the desperate conditions they are readily acquainted with in ‘real’ life through the theatrical medium the working class will indeed “seize the torch”. The “eighty thousand men who want jobs” (MacColl, *The Damnable Town* 46) decide to

instigate an active struggle so that “for the first time in many years faces and bodies which should be kept in the shadow of the back street had come into the light” (111). MacColl’s realism is consistently populated by the working class that represent both his origins and the instrumental centre of his political project.

v “A theatre with a living language”: an indigenous ‘epic’ tradition

The primary question, then, is how can this revolutionary potential of the working class be summoned up, nurtured and realised in the current socio-political climate. Can theatre perform a role not only in presenting actual material conditions but also in provoking the revolution Engels foresees? How can the locality of the organic intellectual be effectively dramatised? Is there a form of realism that could simultaneously educate and stimulate to action?

Naturalism had been a profoundly influential artistic philosophy, transforming the nature of the dramatic form from theatre in which it was customary, according to Zola, to “wave swords, bellow without a break, to go a scale too shrill in sentiment and language” (Bentley 355-6) to an “insistence on the drama of ordinary life” (Williams, *Drama* 337). Raymond Williams presents the revolutionary nature of the naturalist stage as follows:

Important naturalist drama developed, historically, in just that period of liberal revolt against orthodox liberalism, of individual revolt against an orthodox ‘individualist’ society, of bourgeois revolt against the forms of bourgeois life (337).

According to Williams, naturalism was inextricably connected with a general unrest and reassessment of values in society and, when one examines the Mancunian novel tradition of Gaskell or Dickens, this indeed seems to be the case. It is a genre grounded in the historio-material and social developments of the period. The nineteenth century was characterised by a predominance of scientific investigation, by what Zola refers to as “the movement of inquiry and analysis” (Bentley 356). This innovation “has sent us back to the study of documents, to experience, made us realize that to start afresh we must first take things back to the beginning, become familiar with man and nature” (ibid). Developments in the scientific realm should, according to Zola, also impact on the artistic, thereby producing a mode of articulation that examines, discusses and actively investigates. Naturalism in drama is also a mode readily associated with change and revolt, which enabled the playwright to dramatisé this “period in which bourgeois society was being

fundamentally criticized and rejected" (ibid). As Mordecai Gorelik suggested in *New Theatres For Old*, naturalism was not the primary artistic mode of the hegemony; rather "to be called a Naturalist in the Paris theatre of the seventies [1870s] is like being called a Red in the New York theatre of today" (129). However, naturalism does have some limitations and the major restrictions inherent in it are related predominantly to the necessary maintenance of illusion. Naturalistic artists attempt to focus on contemporary actuality but necessarily maintain linear chronological time, well-developed characters who react in a consistent manner to one another and engage in dialogue, and visual suggestions of place in the form of elaborate sets. All these aspects of the genre contribute to a preservation of the illusion that what is happening on stage is occurring in 'real' time, that the audience has to peer through a permeable fourth wall in order to view the action but not participate in it. The theatre pretends to be reality. Bertolt Brecht, one of naturalism's most insightful and influential critics, questions whether a "technique that equips an actor to make the audience see rats where there aren't any can really be all that suitable for disseminating the truth" (Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre* 142) and more tellingly diagnosed a tendency to inactive fatalism in audience-response to a typical naturalistic play, something he countered in his concept of 'epic' theatre. MacColl concluded similarly with reference to the company's adaptation of Stanislavsky's methods:

Then again, we don't want a theatre like Stanislavsky's where everybody is so busy living the role that they cannot step out of the role and comment on it from time to time (Samuel et al. 244).

Hence, in order to generate a genre that would more completely address themes of the everyday, MacColl and the Theatre Workshop company searched beyond the naturalist tradition for a "form which is sufficiently flexible to capture the rhythms of twentieth century life" (Littlewood, *From Kendal to Berlin* 5). However, rather than reject naturalism, MacColl sought to develop his aesthetic by combining differing traditions to produce an eclectic form that adopted, in his opinion, the best aspects of many theatre genres. Gorelik seemingly has a similar conviction when he argues that "epic principles can, quite definitely, be applied to other styles of theatre—Naturalism for instance—as a means of clarifying and strengthening other styles" (441). This is MacColl's objective: to produce a mode of theatre that adapts the best aspects of many traditions. MacColl aspired to create a "theatre which was sufficiently flexible to reflect the constantly changing twentieth-century political scene" (Samuel et al. 241) and, as he developed his theatrical style accordingly, he began, I argue, to produce works in what might be called the 'epic realist' tradition.

MacColl's experiments with epic theatre have been largely overlooked. Janelle Reinelt's *After Brecht: British Epic Theater* concludes, somewhat conventionally, that epic theatre in Britain began in 1956 with the performances in London of the Berliner Ensemble and the first production of Brecht's *Mother Courage and her Children* staged, interestingly, by Theatre Workshop after the company's move to Stratford (6). The book cites the progression of epic aesthetics from Edward Bond to John McGrath, but there is no mention of MacColl at all. Similarly lacking is Christopher Innes' *Modern British Drama: the Twentieth Century*. It contains a sizeable description of epic theatre conventions in Britain; Innes cites Robert Bolt as the "British Brecht" (115) but the first of Bolt's plays mentioned is *Flowering Cherry* written in 1957 a full twelve years after MacColl's *Johnny Noble* which contains significant epic conventions of Brechtian types and over ten years after the first draft of MacColl's most noticeably epic play *Uranium* 235. His only mention of Theatre Workshop's Brechtian influences relates to the music hall conventions of *Oh, What a Lovely War* (121) a play produced without MacColl's input. MacColl is referred to only briefly and is exclusively connected with the Red Megaphones and agitprop (73). However, Michael Verrier in his critique of Brechtian convention and the folk movement suggests that he was instrumental in the development of epic theatre in Britain. He maintains that MacColl and Littlewood were "among the first British practitioners to make use of techniques now associated with Bertolt Brecht" (Russell and Atkinson 108). Brecht and MacColl were constructing similar theatrical aesthetics during approximately the same period. Whether the two had any sustained contact remains arguable, though MacColl claimed that he "first knew about Brecht about 1933-4, and later served with him on an international committee of the theatre (Woods, *Folk Review* May 1973 6), but there are certainly similarities between their work which suggests that in their individual searches for a new form Brecht and MacColl progress along similar paths³⁸.

³⁸ The relationship between Brecht and MacColl is a contentious issue. There are a number of suggestions that they met during the 1930s. Michael Verrier writes that "MacColl is virtually silent of the subject but Joan Littlewood believed that he met Brecht in the 1930s; and Doc Rowe, a leading authority on the Radio Ballads, recalls MacColl having shown him books presented to him by Brecht himself" (Russell and Atkinson 110). Derek Paget suggests that MacColl and the company "found the network of the international communist movement very useful" (Paget, *Theatre Workshop, Mousinnac and the European Connection*, 213) and it is perfectly possible that some of Brecht's ideas, writings or plays crossed the Channel via this medium. Indeed Mousinnac's book which greatly influenced Theatre Workshop's aesthetic contains some reference to Brecht's *Mahagonny*. The connections between MacColl and Brecht remain difficult to discern and rooted in speculation.

MacColl's first foray into what we might loosely call epic theatrical conventions³⁹ was his Living Newspaper production, *Last Edition*, performed by Theatre Union in 1940⁴⁰. The Living Newspaper is an extension of agitprop, a connection between slogan-dominated yet dynamic agitprop tradition and the techniques of epic realism. MacColl and Theatre Workshop became aware of the Living Newspaper genre through sustained contact with the Laboratory Theatre in New York (Woods, *Folk Review* May 1973 6). It was in this area that American theatre profoundly influenced MacColl and Littlewood's dramatic work. Stuart Cosgrove suggests that "both Agit-Prop and Living Newspaper style were fundamental to Workers Theatre [in America] because they could be changed, reformed and reassessed" (Samuel et al. 275).

Mordecai Gorelik, scene designer and author of the highly influential text *New Theatres For Old* (1947), a book that influenced Theatre Workshop's ideas about theatrical form, connects the two distinct traditions of epic and Living Newspaper together, stating that "thanks to the work of the Living Newspaper, some of the possibilities of Epic production have received acknowledgement" (429). The Living Newspaper form is constructed around a "group of actors who by the use of rapid documentation and improvisatory techniques would stage virtually instant dramatisations of the day's news" (Unity, *Introduction by John Allen*). This is a realism that directly responds and relates to the contemporary world, and this objective is so integral to MacColl's aesthetic that during the performance run of *Last Edition* "we kept changing the show and putting in new scenes every week" (MacColl, *Grassroots* 66). Rather like a conventional newspaper, this theatrical equivalent provides a contemporaneous account, reacting to developments in politics and society. Gorelik cites epic as a genre whose "canvas is the broad one of events rather than the narrower one of personal fate" (412). The canvas of the Living Newspaper, like the epic, is also sizeable enabling the playwright and

³⁹ By 'epic theatre' I mean that movement epitomised by the experiments of Bertolt Brecht rather than the Epic Cycles of Homer or Virgil. In Brechtian epic, and indeed in MacColl's indigenous epic, "what is 'natural' must have the force of what is startling" (Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre* 71); it was a new, innovative way of presenting ideas. However, MacColl's aesthetic was heavily influenced by ancient Greek forms; this theme is discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.

⁴⁰ *Last Edition* received a substantial amount of attention when it was first performed at Houldsworth Hall, Manchester in May 1940. MacColl states that after five performances, the police stopped the run and, with Joan Littlewood, he was fined and arrested (Goorney and MacColl xlvii). This is corroborated in the MI5 files relating to MacColl that have recently been released (2006). The files note that "Miller was fined £1 and Littlewood was Bound Over in the sum of £10" (National archives file KV/2/2175 43).

company to discuss an extensive range of themes and incidents. *Last Edition* deals with both national industrial crises (the Gresford Pit Disaster⁴¹ and potential strikes) and international political situations (the Munich Pact, the Spanish Civil War). Although MacColl does focus on the individual, personal experience of those involved in these events, *Last Edition* predominantly narrates the larger socio-political concerns of the day in order to assess them critically. This is, of course, a primary characteristic of the epic; as Walter Benjamin puts it, epic theatre “does not reproduce conditions but, rather, reveals them” (Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht* 4).

Elements of the Living Newspaper (the episodic structure, the lack of linear chronology, the consistent focus on actual events) can be perceived throughout MacColl’s canon. He develops these ideas in his later work as he consciously seeks a workable epic framework. Particularly evident throughout his theatrical output is the distinct lack of illusion and resistance to emotional disengagement. Peggy Seeger addresses this aspect of MacColl’s work in her introduction to his autobiography. She writes that he “felt that appealing to the heart alone was a cop-out and that it was unfair to make people weep or laugh without making them think at the same time” (MacColl, *Journeyman* 3). Although she refers to his work on his autobiography, the quotation could just as readily be applied to MacColl’s writing generally. His theatre, written and performed in an epic style, corresponds to this principle. In developing his epic aesthetic, he does not confront contemporary society through illusion or escapism. By contrast, as Brecht proposes, epic theatre eliminates the necessity that the “audience... hangs its brains up in the cloakroom along with its coat” (Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre* 27). This is, as MacColl recognises, in marked contrast to many of the various forms of amusement currently available, particularly to the working-class audience. He indicates the types of entertainment he rejects in *Festival of Fools*⁴², in which he presents a patient in a hospital who is beginning to doubt the integrity of the government. The nurses have tried “bingo treatments, pools, television, pop music and sedation” but to no avail. Eventually they remove the man’s vocal chords so he is not able to influence his contemporaries. The doctors state that “our job is to protect them [the people] from disturbing influence” (ibid). MacColl concludes that, in general, entertainment has

⁴¹ This event remains a prominent motif in the folk tradition and was reappraised most recently by Seth Lakeman in his song *The Colliers* on his *Freedom Fields* album (2006).

⁴² There are seemingly multiple versions of this, directly addressing particular years. I have examined the 1965 manuscript and the 1970 version. Both are in the 7:84 archive at the National Library of Scotland.

become a form of tranquilliser, disconnecting the audience from contemporary actuality and instead presenting soporific illusion. Brecht argues that “the epic theatre isn’t against the emotions; it tries to examine them, and isn’t satisfied just to stimulate them” (Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre* 162); as Frederic Jameson declares, “what is fatal is always the failure to learn” (Jameson ed. *Brecht and Method* 91). Indeed, Augusto Boal, in agreement with Benjamin, does not regard empathy purely as objectionable but as a dangerous controlling of the discursive and observational potential of humanity:

The man relinquishes his power of decision to the image (113).

MacColl’s plays consistently teach, presenting a didactic interpretation of modern events and circumstances, rather than creating uncritical empathy or an illusory image of the world, and urges us to learn from them. This is not to say, however, that naturalism ceased to impact upon MacColl’s work. On the contrary, naturalism, as the first section of this chapter reveals remained a key influence with plays such as *Landscape with Chimneys* and *Johnny Noble*. However, even in these plays naturalism is not adopted uncritically and with the inclusion of theatrical techniques such as the narrator figure, the platform stage, song and direct declamation, it would be inaccurate to say that these plays are naturalism; rather they exhibit certain aspects of naturalism (recognisable speech patterns, a specific backdrop— though this urban space is only referred to through the speech of the narrator rather than painted scenery or props— and developed characters) in order to further a political agenda. MacColl’s plays always disclose a multiplicity of influences and it remains difficult and even unwise to place them firmly in a generic category. And so plays such as *The Other Animals*, his most Expressionist piece, and *Uranium 235*, which juxtapose a variety of different forms from music hall to puppetry, both contain, in MacColl’s words, “short naturalistic episode[s]” (Goorney and MacColl liv).

In turning to a Brechtian-style epic mode, MacColl aspires to create an audience that is able to consider the work and contemplate the actual conditions and injustices of the material world. In order to make things easier for the members of audience, MacColl introduces his own concept of Brecht’s *Verfremdungseffekt*. Walter Benjamin describes this device stating that “the damming of the stream of real life, the moment when its flow comes to a standstill, makes itself felt as reflux: this reflux is astonishment” (Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht* 13). It is making something that is conventional and recognisable, strange and unfamiliar. MacColl

constructs a similar device that he refers to as “‘acting-out’ episodes” (Goorney and MacColl xlvi). Though this may well have been influenced by Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*, this is an independent concept created by MacColl in response to the need to engage fully with his audience. These ‘acting-out episodes’ are particularly noticeable in a scene in *Last Edition* which recounts the Gresford Pit Disaster of 1934. The narrator informs the audience that “except for a few persons working near the pit bottom, and one deputy and five men who managed to escape from the 29’s district, all the men who were working in the section at the time lost their lives the same day, which brought the total loss of life up to 265” (25). MacColl introduces a tragic episode with a purely factual description. Indeed, he uses a similar technique in *Landscape with Chimneys*. As a Jewish refugee from Germany, Trudi potentially embodies the kind of character with whom the audience could readily empathise. This possibility is exacerbated by her suicide, in which she takes both her own life and her baby’s. Her final speech in which she admits to the failure of her relationship with Frank is striking, and MacColl seemingly encourages an empathetic audience response. Yet he interrupts the scene and, rather than dramatise the suicide act, it is Mrs Foster who describes Trudi’s death, thereby creating an element of detachment. This is augmented by the inclusion of a conversation between the Stage Manager and the Professor. Just as the audience is beginning to experience the empathetic emotions that epic theatre strives to eliminate, MacColl uses the scene to make a comment on the nature of theatre and the expectations of the audience:

You know I think it was a mistake to stage the previous scene (54).

The Professor continues his argument stating that “somehow people don’t mind a little sordidness as long as it has a historical label...set the play in an overcrowded slum in Hulme or Gateshead, put the men in overalls and there’ll be a public outcry” (55). MacColl creates a distancing effect, interrupting the potential empathetic experience with a discussion of the suitability of such material for the theatre, and a critique of bourgeois concepts of art and working-class themes.

The use of time, the concept of staging and the relations between actors and characters are other aspects of the theatrical experience that are affected by this detachment. If illusion is no longer the primary objective of the play, time becomes less rigid. Maintenance of Aristotelian chronological time is no longer a prerequisite; the plot does not require linear progression and “one can as it were take a pair of scissors and cut it [the play] into individual pieces, which remain fully capable of life” (Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre* 70). *Uranium* 235 exemplifies a

rejection of the constraints of sequential narrative, juxtaposing a scene at the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society in which John Dalton addresses the businessmen (95), with a description of the discoveries of Mendeleyev (98), with, after an interval, auditions for the Puppet Master's "tragi-comedy with massed bands and fireworks" (100). The maintenance of the illusion that the drama is unfolding in 'real' time is unnecessary in epic theatre as there is the dismissal of the "Aristotelian notion of organic unity...[which is] rejected in favour of a technical, indeed artificial, construct: the montage and collage of heterogeneous elements" (Mews ed. 38). The presentation becomes theme-centred rather than plot-centred.

One of the other ways of disrupting the unities of illusion and creating an engaged realism is to show the apparatus of the stage (Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre* 141). For example, in *Landscape with Chimneys*, for all its naturalism, the light and sound checks are performed as part of the play. The electrician explicitly refers to the lighting set-up as "four out front and four on the set" (2). It becomes evident from the outset that *Landscape with Chimneys* is a piece of theatre. In addition, the actor "need not pretend that the events taking place on the stage have never been rehearsed" (Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre* 194); rehearsals are an inherent part of the performance process and can therefore remain a presence even in the final presentation. In *Uranium 235* MacColl develops this theme by allowing his actors to refer to other performances:

He's got a difficult costume change. This jumping about from one character to another is bloody confusing. One of these performances I'm going to come on in the Greek scene dressed as a Manchester businessman (94).

It becomes obvious to the audience that *Uranium 235* has been rehearsed and has indeed been performed on previous occasions. In naturalism the characters respond to one another as if for the first time, but in MacColl's epic theatre the script is acknowledged as a significant aspect of the dramatic presentation. In MacColl's additional conclusion for *Uranium 235*, which casts doubt on his original assumption that scientific advancement in the area of nuclear physics could have benefits, one of the actors describes the revision process:

That's right—the original script was written in 1946 and played for just over an hour. Then a longer version was made in 1947 and then they kept altering it by subtracting scenes and adding it to others until about 1952 (126).

The acknowledgement of the script is also present in *Landscape with Chimneys*. Upon Hugh's arrival on the stage, the Stage Manager accuses him of entering early: "according to my script you enter on the words 'you can never rely on trains these

days” (4). The script is a constant presence in the plays and consistently assists in the breaking down of the theatrical illusion.

To disclose this formal rejection of illusion is, of course, not to suggest that epic theatre is devoid of character, but there is a marked change in the roles of the actors and their relation to the characters they portray. Actors do not attempt to convince the audience that they *are* the characters. Instead there should remain a detachment between the character and the actor performing the character. Brecht advocates the position of the demonstrator and suggests that “the feelings and opinions of the demonstrator and the demonstrated are not merged into one” (Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre* 125); MacColl often incorporates this epic technique into his plays. For example, *Uranium 235* contains frequent references to the concept of theatre as demonstration rather than illusion. Actors, as we have seen, complain about quick costume changes and ask their fellow performers to “give me a hand with this cravat, will you” (94). The actor playing the Scientist at the beginning of the piece draws particular attention to the theatrical device of demonstration:

In the course of putting on this chiton I have ceased to be a twentieth-century physicist, gone through a transition phase of being myself playing an actor, and finally taken on the external habiliments of an old Greek gentleman (82).

Furthermore, MacColl’s actors are sometimes even given a history and an identity beyond the confines of the theatre walls. The Stage Manager in *Landscape with Chimneys* concludes his role by informing the audience of his daily experience outwith the theatre:

It’s getting late. I’ll have to be getting along or I’ll miss my supper. I’m in digs and my landlady doesn’t like me to keep her waiting. I wish I could find a cheap flat (70).

MacColl uses a clever device here; he explicitly reveals that the dramatic production the audience have just witnessed was a piece of theatre rather than ‘real’ life by introducing the Stage Manager’s ‘real’ existence as a tenant. However, he also reiterates the central thematic concern of the piece, the lack of personal property, and directly addresses this situation that is prevalent outwith the theatre. His most advanced and sustained example of this method of character presentation is in *Uranium 235*. Each actor has a variety of different parts and can step out of these roles at any stage during the proceedings so that an individual participating in a kind of Greek Chorus can suddenly interrupt proceedings by reverting to a commentating role: “what a load of codswallop!” (83).

Beginning in his experimentation with the Living Newspaper form, this disconnection of actor and character granted new possibilities to the playwright. The actor can now declaim factual statistics and present themes for discussion. Due to the declamatory nature of this theatrical tradition, the figure of the narrator regains prominence in the epic tradition. For MacColl his experimentation with declamation began with his early work in agitprop and his participation in the left-wing political scene of Manchester-Salford. Just as the company's presentations for the cotton workers' strike of 1931 are defined by direct oration, so the later works contain numerous examples of characters who candidly address the audience; the narrator is an important figure in this tradition as he/she is able to comment on events and present a didactic voice. This figure reappears throughout MacColl's work, from the singing narrators of *Johnny Noble* to the Stage Manager of *Landscape with Chimneys*, to the incorporeal voices of *The Other Animals*. In addition, the narrator does not remain a disembodied voice entirely detached from the action. In *Landscape with Chimneys* the Stage Manager directly interacts with audience and actors alike. There is no separation of actors and narrator, for all on stage are fulfilling purely declamatory roles. MacColl does not regard illusory characters as necessary for a dramatic production; a descriptive voice can be employed in order to denote place, describe a situation or directly inform the audience of some piece of background information. The role of the actor in his epic theatre is therefore transformed from a figure of pretence and illusion to a participator in the declamation of a specific idea.

Evidently, epic theatre did not naturally fulfil the expectations of his audience, and MacColl recognises this:

Don't you feel you're being cheated? I mean after all, you've paid your money to see a play, a drama, and so far nothing's happened. The author hasn't even had the decency to kill off any of his characters. What kind of play is this? No settings, no cigarettes by Abdullah, no evening dress by Moss Brothers, no compromise with convention (MacColl, *Landscape with Chimneys* 39).

Epic theatre is not founded upon a conventional view of the audience. MacColl's aim is to challenge his audience, using entertainment to "awaken a population that was still drowsy from its 100-year-old sleep of imperial greatness...who were afraid to shout for what was theirs for fear it would disturb the neighbours" (MacColl, *Journeyman* 183).

Indeed, the primary objectives of epic realism are establishing the political unity of the working class and provoking a socio-political revolution. Politics is the major characterising factor and was—with MacColl as with Brecht—the initiating force behind the creation of this new formal method. John Willett suggests that “where other politically-minded artists show their attitude only in the ‘message’ of their work, or even in public gestures to which their work bears no special relation, with Brecht it seems to go deep into his writing, his theories and his productions, and to shape them down to the last small detail” (Willett, *Theatre of Bertolt Brecht* 187). A similar sentiment could just as readily be applied to MacColl. Whereas earlier naturalist presentations of working class existence tend to merely reflect the ‘real’, epic interpretations make a direct challenge to the audience. The naturalism of *Landscape with Chimneys* and *Johnny Noble* is combined with epic conventions, and rather than just reflecting contemporary life, there are revolutionary challenges inherent in both. *Johnny Noble* concludes with a man entering the stage from the audience, thereby directly aligning his voice with the voice of the audience members, and creating a sense of unity between the stage and the auditorium. The man informs Johnny, “you’ve two hands and a brain and there’s plenty of you. Take the world in your hands, Johnny, and wipe it clean” (66). Johnny replies, “do you hear that? It’s our world. It’s up to us” (ibid) thereby repositioning the challenge from the individual (Johnny) to the collective (other characters and audience). There is a similar conclusion in the *Landscape with Chimneys*’ song *Which Side are you on?* The Stage Manager, the unequivocal mediator between the audience and the actors, sings:

Workers can you stand it?
 I don’t know how you can.
 Oh will you be a good tame mouse.
 Or will you be a man?
 Which side are you on? (68)

This is not merely a reflecting on the material conditions of the working class as in Greenwood’s *Love on the Dole* or Corrie’s *In Time o’ Strife* or O’Casey’s *The Plough and the Stars*; due to its rejection of typical conventions of linear narrative and the maintenance of illusion, MacColl’s plays can make a direct and public challenge to the audience members. This is equally evident in *Uranium 235*. Like Brecht’s *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, which concludes with a stark warning that “the womb he [Ui/Hitler] crawled from still is going strong” (96), the final scene of *Uranium 235* alerts the audience to the potentially catastrophic consequences of



scientific advancement. After a thorough description of the perils of nuclear experimentation one of the actors asks “have you decided where you’re going on your holidays next year? Have you made plans yet? Maybe you shouldn’t bother. There may not be a next year or a next month for that matter, or next week...or tomorrow” (130). The defining characteristic of epic theatre is that it challenges the audience, presenting it with an image of contemporary existence and then suggesting methods of revolutionising it. It is in the constituent makeup of the audience that MacColl perceives a discernible difference between his theatre and Brecht’s. MacColl concludes in one of his few explicit references to his German contemporary, that Theatre Workshop “work in the opposite way to Brecht because Brecht was working inside an established theatre, where his audience was largely middle-class; and Brecht never broke away from this, he never *attempted* to break away from it” (Woods, *Folk Review* June 1973 4). He concludes with evocations of his ideals:

A theatre that expresses the dreams, the hopes, the aspirations, the despairs of working people. And a theatre that, technically, is sufficiently flexible to reflect the constantly changing twentieth-century scene. I don’t think Brecht was doing that, great as he is (Woods, *Folk Review* June 1973 4).

Whether MacColl’s suppositions here are correct or not, it is interesting that he makes some attempt to disassociate himself with Brecht’s theatre whilst simultaneously revealing his great admiration for the German’s work. MacColl’s epic theatre remains both for and about the working class. He is not aiming to challenge a middle-class theatre-going audience, but to create an entirely new audience demographic, a theatre that could reflect and provoke the working class, though Theatre Workshop in both Manchester and, even more so, in London did get a large proportion of middle classes in its audiences.

vi Looking to the Continent: twentieth-century theatrical conventions.

In his experiments in agitprop, his utilisation of naturalism and his creation of an indigenous epic realism, MacColl’s general aesthetic is consistently informed by his experiences in the Manchester-Salford locality. Extending his realism, MacColl also adapts various other contemporary continental artistic techniques for use in his theatre. His realism, rather than illusory, is a conglomeration of traditions and techniques, assembled to provide a useful tool in the explication of working-class space and experience. As MacColl puts it “we were beginning to bring

together ideas of movement, ideas of speech, ideas of acting generally” (MacColl, *Grassroots* 64). In this it could be argued that Theatre Workshop with MacColl as its primary writer, created the most innovative aesthetic of his generation. As Pete Seeger suggests, “these people were doing the finest theatre in Europe out of the back of a truck for union halls” (Orr and O’Rourke Part Four). MacColl’s writing consistently reveals his interest in and fascination with the theatrical work of his continental contemporaries.

Firstly, he cites the significant influence of Russian Constructivist conventions (Samuel et al. 242) which became noticeable aspects of his work from his early *John Bullion*. The movement’s emphasis on invention and the elimination of much of the traditional theatrical aesthetic is inextricably related to the political situation in Russia during the period of Revolution. Constructivist directors of the post-Revolution period were, like MacColl, politically engaged and keen to uphold the values and doctrines of Communism. In 1919 Vakhtangov asserted that “the material, spiritual, emotional and intellectual aspects of human life have been stirred up by a hurricane the like of which mankind’s history has never seen” (131), thereby associating the historical and political with the cultural. This hurricane could tear down the theatre of the past. But as Meyerhold, one of the key figures in this movement, suggested “the Revolution was not only destruction, but creation as well” (Gladkov 93). The Constructivists were aware of the potential to demolish and rebuild; they acknowledged the artistic possibilities of this new society. In Russia actual revolutionary changes were negotiated through the medium of theatre, and it is unsurprising that MacColl incorporated some of the techniques (platform staging, a rejection of the need to constantly maintain illusion, focusing on the figure of the actor and his/her movements) of this politically challenging medium into his own realist aesthetic.

In addition to Russian Constructivism, MacColl’s work also imbibes another twentieth-century theatrical form, Expressionism. It has been stated that the Expressionist movement had little noticeable impact on theatrically conservative Britain. Critics argue that German Expressionism made more of an impact on the United States than upon Britain, the exception being Sean O’Casey who was, it should be noted, actually Irish (Furness 89)⁴³. Apart from the Vorticist movement

⁴³ Although there is no concrete suggestion that MacColl and O’Casey ever met, after the 1949 Edinburgh Festival production of *The Other Animals*, Hugh MacDiarmid wrote to O’Casey informing him of the production and asking for permission for Theatre Workshop to produce

and the high Modernism of Eliot, critics have claimed that Expressionism was disregarded by British artists. There are certainly Expressionistic elements in plays such as W.H. Auden's *Dance of Death* (1933) with its dance episodes and symbolically representative characters, and Stephen Spender's *Trial of a Judge* (1938) which is illuminated by 'light and colours suggesting illusion and uncertainty' (13). However, these plays seem at first to be an exception to a generally accepted rule. Indeed Breon Mitchell argues that "as far as England was concerned, Expressionism was a German style which dried out in the twenties. It was of interest in what it revealed about post-war Germany and the particular problems of the German people, but had little to say to the average Englishman" (Weisstein ed. 192). Some suggest that Expressionism did "put down roots" (Behr, Shulamith et al. 37) in Britain but this was entirely due to the immigration of German refugees such as Ernst Toller. MacColl dispels these suppositions by creating one distinctly Expressionist work in *The Other Animals* (with episodic structure, complex linguistic presentation, a focus on the psyche of the protagonist and the juxtaposition of abstract and material) and consistently incorporating Expressionistic conventions into his other plays. His use of Expressionism in British theatre marks him as unique in twentieth-century theatre history. His innovative employment of the Expressionist form as a method in his realist aesthetic remains unmatched in British drama.

Although MacColl's interest in Russian Constructivism, inextricably associated as it is with the Communist Revolution, is understandable and easily acceptable, his preoccupation with the Expressionist form is seemingly less explicable. Expressionism has always held a central position in Marxist debates about Modernism and political efficacy. In an article of 1933 published in the WTM bulletin, the author directly addresses the relationship between Socialism and Expressionism and has little to say in favour of the latter. He concludes that "expressionism is less a type of revolutionary and proletarian drama, than a type of decadent and pessimistic bourgeois drama" (Samuel et al. 167). This attitude towards the Expressionist form is not unique to the WTM bulletin. Indeed its most vociferous advocate is Marxist critic Georg Lukács, who concludes that "when followed through logically, Expressionism repudiated any connection with reality

Cock-a-Doodle-Andy (Bold, *Letters of Hugh MacDiarmid* 6/10/49 299). According to a letter by MacDiarmid dated 2nd March 1953, Sean O'Casey did visit Edinburgh during this period (Riach and Grieve ed. 299) and there is the suggestion in the BBC programme on MacColl's life, *Rhythms of the World*, that Sean O'Casey enjoyed a performance of *Uranium* 235.

and declared a subjectivist war on reality and all its works" (Jameson ed. *Aesthetics and Politics* 40). Why therefore would MacColl as a politically engaged artist creating didactic Communist theatre explore the techniques of Expressionism in his work? If, as Lukács supposes, Expressionism intrinsically represents fragmentation and individualism with no possibility for profound political transformation, MacColl's decision to write some of his plays in this form appears absurd. This, however, is to leave an important intermediary figure out of consideration.

Writing during the 1920s/30s in Germany, Ernst Toller was a playwright whose intentions were remarkably similar to MacColl's own. In a letter of 1920 he states that "the place of the proletarian poet is among the ranks of the workers. The proletarian [sic] needs poets whose speech he can understand and in whose speech throbs the heavy pulse of the masses, of the factories and of the inevitable grand towns" (Toller, *Letters from Prison* 41). The notion of addressing the working class in an understandable language whilst directly confronting the predominant issues of their lives is consistently evident in MacColl's own writings. Both playwrights were confronted with the problematic issue of form; how could theatre candidly challenge the political hegemony and confront the concerns of a working-class audience? Toller's solution was to experiment with Expressionism, and this becomes the predominant style in his canon. Whereas Lukács maintains that Expressionism is inherently decadent, bound up with the capitalist discourse of the bourgeoisie, Toller reappropriates this form for his own political objectives and MacColl undertakes a similar assignment in his own work; he makes a new evaluation of the Expressionist form, adapting techniques and conventions associated with this movement for his own theatrical project, creating a hybrid realist method.

MacColl must have been aware of Toller's work early in his career. In Fred Wood's interview he recalls that during his early work with the Red Megaphones, his primary influences were "the German Expressionists more than anybody—people like Toller and Wedekind" (Woods, *Folk Review* May 1973 6). If this is a correct recollection, MacColl and his company were interacting with Expressionist aesthetics in the early 1930s and techniques associated with this movement augmented his agitprop aesthetic. Toller is mentioned in Leon Mousinnac's influential book, *The New Movement in Theatre* (1931) which the company were well aware of. One plate illustrates Lee Simonson's work in New York during his production of Toller's *Masses Man* (*Man and the Masses*) (Mousinnac, plate 112).

This appreciation of Toller's work was augmented during the Theatre of Action⁴⁴ phase when MacColl and the company performed in a version of *Draw the Fires* (Samuel et al. 249). Toller arrived in Britain in 1933 as an exile from Nazi Germany. His 1935 production of *Draw the Fires* in Manchester required a number of actors to represent workers shovelling coal. After dismissing the existing actors as entirely unconvincing, Toller approached Theatre of Action. Although the experience confirmed the restrictions of traditional directorship, MacColl did regard *Draw the Fires* as an interesting text, superior to much of the contemporary theatre of the 1930s (Goorney 7). During these early years he also claimed to have developed an interest in the works of Wedekind, Kaiser and Eugene O'Neill, all of which contain references to the Expressionist mode (Goorney and MacColl xvi). His study of this form culminated in the writing of *The Other Animals* in 1947.

Toller, then, could be seen as something of a guarantor for MacColl that Expressionism—apparently apolitical or even fascistic—could be at the service of the left in its campaign for radical political change.⁴⁵ Ernst Bloch, an advocate of the movement, suggests that the significance of the Expressionist project lay in its objective to undermine “the schematic routines and academicism to which the ‘values of art’ had been reduced” (Jameson ed. 23). MacColl was preoccupied by conflict but his interest lay in the potential outcome of class tension: “I really did want to tear down the world in which I found myself, and build a new world” (Samuel et al. 213). According to Helmut Gruber “this generation of writers [the Expressionists] labored to bring the future into existence in the present” (193). Both MacColl and the German Expressionists glimpsed a future that differed markedly from the present. They, like Stanislavsky, employ the ‘as if’ method of theatre. Expressionism contains many examples of authority being seized by the New Man (Friedrich in Toller's *Transformation* or the Cashier in Kaiser's *From Morning to*

⁴⁴ The American agitprop group Shock Troupe changed its name to Theatre of Action in 1935 after performing *Newsboy* in 1934. MacColl in the Red Megaphones likewise changed their company's name to Theatre of Action after producing the same play (Samuel et al. 247, 277)

⁴⁵ Expressionism is generally not directly associated with any political movement as such. Unlike Constructivism in which Communism is the overarching ideology, Expressionism remains generally quite ambivalent towards politics. During the early 1900s in Germany there was certainly a connection between left-wing politics and the Expressionist movement but there was also a certain amount of intersection between the convictions of the Expressionists and National Socialism (Furness 72). Indeed, Wyndham Lewis, instrumental in the initiation of the Vorticist movement, the British tradition that is most closely related to Expressionism, held Fascist convictions (Rodrigues and Garrett 122). In spite of this apolitical attitude and even, at times, right wing stance, the Expressionist project does focus upon the dismissal and usurpation of authority; “Expressionism is an art of ideological conflict, even when the conflict is not explicitly political” (Gordon, D 123).

Midnight) and a questioning of the authority of the theatrical canon through the rejection of traditional forms. It is therefore possible to regard Expressionism as “a ‘revolution’, as an inchoate or muddled rebellion against German bourgeois society” (Gordon, D, 27). Peter Bürger insists that “the European avant-garde movements can be defined as an attack on the status of art in bourgeois society” (49) and Expressionism rebels defiantly against bourgeois society and values. It revolts against authority and class dominance, and proposes a society of liberation and personal artistic expression. MacColl’s plays continuously reflect such a rejection of bourgeois authority and a sense of rebellion. In *The Other Animals* this rebellion is successful and Robert leaves with Morning while Graubard discovers that he has been incarcerated by the “universal dream” (196) which becomes reality. Toller’s *Transformation* is similarly celebratory and, to the cries of “revolution”, Friedrich, and the people he has converted, marches offstage. MacColl is able to adopt Expressionistic techniques (fragmented narrative, a focus on the individual psyche, a juxtaposition of abstract and ‘real’, linguistic experiment) in order to present an image of both the repression of dissident voices and the possibility for future change.

Does this dialogue with contemporary theatrical movements therefore place MacColl in an avant-garde aesthetic? Contemporary accounts would certainly suggest that MacColl’s plays were associated with the avant-garde by theatre practitioners and critics:

Uranium 235, as far as the West End was concerned, was ‘avant-garde’ theatre, and, as such, suspect and to be avoided (Goorney 83).

However such an attitude was not espoused by MacColl’s working class audience: “they loved it, ordinary people. The response was fantastic” (Orr and O’Rourke Part Four). Indeed of all MacColl’s plays, it was *Uranium 235*, this ‘avant-garde’ theatre, that most appealed to the audience MacColl consistently strove for. Certainly MacColl’s work imbibes many of the techniques readily associated with avant-garde movements; the presence of fragmentation, rebellion against traditional modes, metatheatrical elements, the focus on subjectivity and the active amalgamation of genres (music, movement techniques, dance, comedy routines, sculpture) all reflect an obvious and sustained connection with the avant-garde. But he was not consciously an avant-gardist at the outset of his theatrical experimentations. His theatre originates in the necessity of politics and in the pressing need to encourage the proletariat towards revolution. As the company ventured into theatrical experimentation “techniques had to be invented as they went

along, and in solving the problems by experiment, they began to lay the foundations for future work” (Goorney 8).

However, one aspect of Theatre Workshop’s project that arguably places them firmly in an avant-garde aesthetic is their continued use of the manifesto. Each incarnation of the theatre group signalled its arrival through a manifesto. Critics rightly associate this genre with the Modernists and their questions regarding the position of the artist, the perpetual dialogue between art and life, and the purpose of art in the modern age. As Luca Somigli puts it “it is precisely through manifestoes that avant-garde artists and writers confront their audience with the problem of the loss of the halo and attempt to articulate new strategies of legitimization of their activity” (20). This is certainly true of MacColl’s manifestoes. In the *Second Manifesto for Theatre Union*, the company declaims that “their struggle for peace and progress manifests itself in many forms and not the least important of these is drama” (Goorney 26). The intention here is evident: the aim of art is the participation in the political struggle. Manifestoes appeared throughout the Modernist period (Lyon 40) from the Futurist’s written declaration of intention by Marinetti to the Dadaist manifesto of Tristan Tzara. Theatre Workshop’s manifestoes are characterised by immediacy, active participation and collective identity, consistently utilising the ‘we’ form in order to appeal to the audience and to create a sense of unity in the company. They are inextricably linked with the Marxist ideas of history as a class struggle and the urgency of revolution:

It is precisely this feature of the manifesto— the emphasis on ‘now, not later’— that turns modernity on its axis to reveal its history not only as one of progress, but also as one of conflicts and repetitions (Lyon 205).

MacColl’s manifestoes legitimize and expose the intentions of his theatrical work. They form a link between the artistic performances and the contemporary world outwith the theatre. They, therefore, reveal MacColl’s preoccupation with the relationship between art and the world, and the ability of art to fulfil an active role in the transformation of society.

In spite of this incorporation of avant-garde theatrical techniques and his readiness to disseminate his ideas through the manifesto form, MacColl certainly does not adopt Modernist constructs uncritically as he creates his own method of epic realism. Expressionism, for instance, is readily associated with a “mystical, even religious element” (Furness 21). In spite of MacColl’s focus on the psyche

and the inner consciousness, he vehemently resists any metaphysical reading of the contemporary world and his theatre remains categorically material; *The Other Animals* is unequivocally a study of actual class interactions and the dominance of the hegemony as MacColl perceives them. In this play he does indeed focus exclusively on the individual, but he does not suggest that the central figure is isolated from the actual material conditions of society, rather that he represents them. For the Expressionists “art is no longer communication. The chasm between the artist and society has been widened to the point where even the desire to bridge it is lost” (Sokel, *Writer in Extremis* 68). For MacColl art is always communication, and the artist should consistently both reflect society and challenge the population. On the level of practical theatre craft too, MacColl was discriminating in what he borrowed; he does not adopt the intricate designs of the innovative Continental sets. For example, in his version of *The Good Soldier Schweik*, Piscator employed very intricate scenery. In discussion with MacColl, the German refugee actors from Piscator’s company “spoke disparagingly of equipment which kept breaking down and which, when it did work, made so much noise that the actors couldn’t be heard” (Gorner and MacColl xlii). In his choice of set MacColl wisely chose only those innovations that best served his theatre. He was certainly not indiscriminating in his utilisation of avant-garde techniques, but did recognise the potential of many of them and employed them to good effect in his own work. Brecht suggests that in his own theatre “the workers judged everything by the amount of truth contained in it; they welcomed any innovation which helped the representation of truth, of the real mechanism of society; they rejected whatever seemed like playing, like machinery working for its own sake” (Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre* 110). This remains MacColl’s own position.

In his pursuit of an innovative form of epic realism engaging with the urban locality and the working-class inhabitants, MacColl adopts techniques and conventions from a variety of genres and movements. The origin of his aesthetic resides firmly in the politics of Manchester-Salford and his experience of his birthplace consistently informs his aesthetic. Throughout his theatrical career, MacColl remains an urban organic intellectual in a Gramscian sense. As Gramsci argues, “intellectuals of the urban type have grown up along with industry and are linked to its fortunes” (Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks* 14). It is an inextricable connection and “their job is to articulate the relationship between the entrepreneur and the instrumental mass” (ibid). As an urban organic intellectual, MacColl similarly is charged with the role of constructing a realism that expresses the

experiences of the working class residing in the metropolis. This began in the agitprop mode, and the spontaneity and dynamism of agitprop remain prominent in all MacColl's experiments. From his experiments in naturalism to the establishment of his own epic theatre to the incorporation of Expressionism, Constructivism, dance and music, MacColl's theatre is a melange of styles all subordinated to the primary concern of creating an innovative realism that could inform and challenge the working-class audience of his locality. Gorelik proposes that the "purpose, over centuries of confused experiment, may be summed up as follows: *to influence life by theatrical means*" (5). As MacColl sought to develop his own realist aesthetic, he adapted other theatrical innovations and developed his own ideas in conjunction with both the need to create entertaining, proficient theatre and the overwhelming desire to confront the socio-political situation. His mode of realism is consistently categorised by formal originality, and his theatrical canon embodies his unrelenting preoccupation with the development of a realism that adapts the most effective methods of dramatic presentation in order to confront actual contemporaneous life.

CHAPTER TWO

THE WORKING CLASS DESERVE POETRY: THEATRICAL EXPERIMENTATION

The fluidity of agitprop, with its total disregard for the Aristotelian unities of time and space, seemed to us to be the perfect type of contemporary theatre... what we now wished to do was to explore the agitprop form, determine how far it could be extended and discover whether it could accommodate or be fused with other forms.
(MacColl, *Journeyman* 208)

i Quest for a new form: Mousinnac and the metatheatrical

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Manchester-Salford had been associated with both political and artistic innovation. Through Engels and Marx Manchester became a symbol of the new capitalist system and the potential for revolutionary change: “through Engels and his influence on Marx... Manchester had an international influence on visions of modern industrial society” (Davies and Fielding 3). In addition “Manchester and Salford were at the forefront of the development of the cinema industry” (Davies and Fielding 118) and, as has been illustrated, had always had a thriving literary, theatrical and artistic history through figures such as Gaskell, Houghton and latterly Lowry. Through MacColl and Theatre Workshop this space now became the site of an indigenous avant-garde movement, an aesthetically innovative method of examining the urban space and the working class within it. This chapter examines MacColl’s interaction with contemporary theatrical movements and suggests that his work produces a native theatrical avant-garde, which remained inextricably associated with the proletariat and its industrial environment. It is a uniquely British avant-garde, interacting with movements from both Continental Europe and Modernist America, yet remaining perceptibly British through its interaction with thematic concerns such as the Mancunian influence on nuclear physics or the doctor who speaks in a Shakespearian mode. It is not only a British avant-garde, but more specifically a working-class one, focusing, through radical formal structures, on themes associated with the everyday experience of the British proletariat such as war, unemployment, poverty and political dissidence. If agitprop functioned as the foundation of Theatre Workshop’s aesthetic, MacColl’s use of some of the essentials of overseas historical

avant-garde⁴⁶, marked an extension, a development of a mature yet highly experimental mode.

MacColl's avant-garde aesthetic is seemingly engendered by two specific factors that are interdependent but distinct. In his description of the early theatrical experiments of the Theatre Workshop group, Goorney cites these two influences. Firstly, as mentioned, he suggests "techniques had to be invented as they went along, and in solving the problems by experiment, they began to lay the foundations for future work" (8). MacColl and the group, that is to say, observed the difficulties within their aesthetic as they attempted to confront the working class experience and sought to overcome them through practical trial and error. Secondly, Goorney reflects on the influence of Leon Mousinnac's illustrated guide to twentieth-century theatrical developments entitled *New Movements in Theatre* which MacColl refers to as "a veritable treasure-trove of concepts and ideas" (Goorney and MacColl xxxiv). Derek Paget has provided a detailed reading of the impact of Mousinnac's book on Theatre Workshop and concludes that the study of this text, among others⁴⁷ "contributed to a significant degree" to the creation of the *mise en scène* (Paget, *Theatre Workshop, Mousinnac and the European Connection* 214). Mousinnac's book contains both quotation and photographic plates from a variety of experimental theatres; he includes such diverse figures as Piscator (included is his version of *Good Soldier Schweik* and his production of Toller's *Hoppla, We're Alive* amongst others), Meyerhold, Vakhtangov and Brecht. Mousinnac, like MacColl, was primarily concerned with presenting actual material existence on the stage and, through experiment, discovering the most appropriate way to do so. Mousinnac questioned the central premises of naturalistic realism:

⁴⁶ In using this term, coined from the work of Peter Bürger, I mean to differentiate between the historical avant-garde and the neo-avant-garde of the 1950s and '60s. It was the techniques and conventions associated with the former that so influenced MacColl's aesthetic.

⁴⁷ Other theatre research books which influenced the Theatre Workshop aesthetic are included in lists in Littlewood's autobiography, *Joan's Book*. Robert Leach cites the particular influence of Mordecai Gorelik's book *New Theatres for Old* which was published in 1947 (Leach, *Theatre Workshop* 80). Gorelik suggested that "the theatre has evolved new forms to meet new conditions, sometimes abandoning an old form midway in favor of a new one showing better promise" (5). This was Theatre Workshop's primary intention and the book's description of theatrical movements from the naturalism of Zola to the epic may well have made a sizeable impact upon MacColl and his work. Mousinnac's book also contains reference to Lee Simonson and, as his study *The Stage is Set* was published in 1932, it is likely that this also influenced the company. He reflects that it is important to create new sets for a purpose, "to relate them to the needs of our own day" (10). This is extremely similar to MacColl's conclusions regarding set design; experiment was part of "our social and political commitment", part of his attempt to confront actual material existence (Goorney and MacColl xlviii).

Once the idea of a stage-property had suggested itself there was no end to the number of accessories that the actor found he required, until finally the art of acting was degraded to the practice of dressing up in real diamonds in order to be drowned—and why not really drowned? we feel obliged to ask—in hundreds of gallons of real water (Mousinnac 6).

This new awareness led to more sophisticated experiment as illustrated in Mousinnac's pictures from productions by Meyerhold, Piscator, and Simonson. Mousinnac poses the same question as Brecht and MacColl: why should a theatre employ illusion in order to present the contemporary world? What is realism and should it contain illusory elements? What is drama's responsibility to the world outwith the confines of the theatre building and what is the most effective means of engaging with that world? In utilising Mousinnac's book so extensively, MacColl and Theatre Workshop place themselves directly within the Continental avant-garde, dialoguing explicitly with its traditions and innovations from Europe in order to create an indigenous and, specifically, an urban, Manchester-based avant-garde.

Mousinnac concludes that "the society of the whole world is being painfully rearranged; and the spiritual confusion created by these social, political, and economic events is reflected in the arts with a disconcerting obviousness. This is a period of drastic re-evaluation" (1). Just as naturalism was engendered by the changes in society brought on by the Industrial Revolution and the subsequent rise of the bourgeoisie, the avant-garde responded to new crises. This latest transformation in the world (with its subsequent revolution in the arts) is inextricably connected with the urban space and the unparalleled growth of industrial advancement, the primary location of this 'drastic re-evaluation'. These changes produced creative compositions that were explicitly conscious of themselves: a body of work that is non-illusory, overtly theatrical and consistently aware of the specific aspects of the theatrical experience. I suggest that MacColl's work, like the productions and scripts of a variety of other stage designers and playwrights cited in this chapter, developed a form of what Lionel Abel refers to as metatheatre. In his metatheatrical critique of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Abel argues that "such plays have truth in them, not because they convince us of real occurrences or existing persons, but because they show the reality of the dramatic imagination, instanced by the playwrights and also by that of the characters" (59). Abel's suggestion is that in metatheatre the 'real' is presented not through illusion but through an awareness of the devices and mechanisms of theatre. It is in essence a form of realism, as it deals with actual situations, concerns and human

interactions. However, this is the realism of agitprop and epic theatre; the contemporary everyday is examined through forms that are overtly and consciously theatrical. MacColl's use of the metatheatrical is, in the tradition of the avant-garde (Scheunemann 19), a rejection of mimesis as it was generally understood in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It "incessantly derives a lively and productive consciousness from the fact that it is theatre" (Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht* 4). The actor, and the theatrical space surrounding the actor, should persistently draw attention to its very nature as theatre rather than deceptively maintaining that the events and exchanges on the stage are actually happening. Although this is seemingly a technique grounded in Modernism and the avant-garde, Abel's sustained use of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* also suggests that the origins of this method are more deep-rooted and have a long and sustained tradition in the literary theatres of Europe, that is it was actively employed by the Elizabethan playwrights, and even (in the use of chorus and narrative voice) by the ancient Greeks. MacColl incorporates this effect throughout his theatrical canon and is aware of both its historicity and its links with modernity.

Edward Gordon Craig concludes his preface to Mousinnac's influential and groundbreaking study as follows:

We have in our land a very wonderful Theatre public—and it doesn't go any more to the Theatre. What goes is a sleepy public, bored by art— simply concerned with its own material comfort (viii).

Elements of the European avant-garde are directly discernible throughout MacColl's canon and these elements consistently challenge both politically and aesthetically, thereby directly confronting this "sleepy public, bored by art"⁴⁸.

Derek Paget suggests that "Theatre Workshop was the Trojan horse through which European radical theatre practices from the 1918-1939 period entered post-war Britain" (Paget, *Theatre Workshop, Mousinnac and the European Connection* 212). This is undoubtedly true, but Theatre Workshop was also a 'Trojan horse' for American theatrical techniques that had been pioneered during the first half of the twentieth century. Robert Leach insists that "MacColl owes as much to such contemporary American drama as Sinclair's *Singing Jailbirds*, Rice's *Street Scene* and *The Adding Machine*, Odets's *Waiting for Lefty* and Wilder's *Pullman Car*

⁴⁸ This chapter will focus exclusively upon the modernist use of the metatheatrical in MacColl's work. His use of the metatheatrical in the plays of the Ancient Greeks and the Elizabethans will be discussed in Chapter Four.

'*Hiawatha*' and *Our Town* as he does to any European models" (Leach, *Theatre Workshop* 65). Mousinnac's text contains noticeable examples of innovative American theatre by directors such as Lee Simonson. In addition, Theatre Workshop's utilisation of the Living Newspaper form, as discussed in chapter one, began after the company became aware of American Federal Theatre's 1936 production of *Triple A Ploughed Under* and the company's most highly-acclaimed dramatic presentation, *One Third of a Nation*, which, according to MacColl and Goorney, had recently closed after 237 performances: "something of a record for a left theatre at the time" (Goorney and MacColl xlv). MacColl was seemingly aware of American politically engaged theatre and its techniques as early as 1929 when he joined the Clarion Players. The company were rehearsing for a production of Upton Sinclair's *Singing Jailbirds* and MacColl was given a part (Samuel et al. 223). This American influence continued throughout Theatre Workshop's production history with the company producing such plays as *Anna Christie* by Eugene O'Neill (1953) and Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* (1958) (Goorney 205-208). In this chapter I aim to expand upon Paget's assertion that Theatre Workshop was a 'Trojan horse', a means of smuggling techniques, plays and aesthetic ideas of both the European and American avant-garde into Britain. I propose that MacColl's canon marks one of the few earnest attempts by a British playwright, certainly outside the Oxbridge Group Theatre, to create a theatre of experiment, innovation and political challenge. It is an indigenous avant-garde, introducing the Mancunian working class (and later the proletariat of other areas in Britain) to a poetic method that integrates the experimental techniques of Europe and America to produce a British, politically challenging dramatic mode.

ii "A platform twenty-five feet by fifteen": the *mise en scène*

Russian theatre is of particular interest to MacColl. He admired a range of Russian practitioners from the early twentieth century and recalled that he felt particular affinity with the Russian director Vakhtangov as he had discovered an aesthetic that effectively combined theatrical elements and political didacticism. MacColl maintained that Vakhtangov "seemed to us to have really found, created a Marxist aesthetic of theatre" (Samuel et al. 243). The integration of Constructivist staging and techniques associated with biomechanics into his work is evident throughout his canon. MacColl asserts that "biomechanics was an attempt to escape from naturalistic acting...we must try and create a theatre which makes maximum

use of all the technology at our disposal. Part of this technology is our understanding of the way the human body works” (Samuel et al. 243). In Russia, theatre director Meyerhold proposed the creation of a new theatre liberated from the illusionist techniques of previous theatrical traditions. This would engender a focus on political theme rather than the visual trappings of the stage. Igor Ilyinsky clarifies Meyerhold’s intentions, stating that, through his use of ‘blank’ staging, his dismissal of traditionally bourgeois theatrical devices and his new attention to the figure of the actor, he could “bring our art to the people, the new spectator, to the workers and peasants, and as well to found a new theater that would express the ideas of Communism” (Schmidt et al. 55). Meyerhold’s style of theatrical presentation is therefore an overtly political method.

Just as the Russian Constructivists were particularly revolutionary in their choice of staging and, so it is in a majority of MacColl’s plays, Constructivist sets provide the backdrop. He rarely employs a ‘realistic’ painted set or elaborate props or wholly illusionist décor. In many ways Constructivism marked both a reaction to a new world in its infancy and a return to an aesthetic method that dominated the theatre during the ancient Greek and Elizabethan/ Jacobean periods, and this is certainly how MacColl regarded it. In Mousinnac’s work, the photographs of the various productions illustrate a new preoccupation with the stage as a platform, a blank space on which a dramatic piece can be displayed. In reference to his production of *The Government Inspector* Meyerhold asserts that “a trestle stage is all I need: it is the fundamental idea that embodies the construction in my work” (Mousinnac plate 103). In the development of his aesthetic, Meyerhold created stage sets that were substantially influenced by the visual art movement of the period. As Alma Law suggests, “the anti-aesthetic approach of the Constructivists, which replaced decoration with utility, made them a natural ally in Meyerhold’s fight against the proponents of traditional theatre décor” (Law, *Meyerhold’s ‘The Magnanimous Cuckold’* 63). Indeed, he collaborated with artist Lyubov Popova for his production *The Magnanimous Cuckold*. Like the equipment in a factory, the stage became a machine for the actors who were themselves ‘biomachines’. The set of *The Magnanimous Cuckold* was designed as a collection of moveable parts creating a kinetic space with which the actors could interact.⁴⁹ Popova included

⁴⁹ For excellent photographs and discussions of Popova’s sets consult Nancy Baer’s *Theatre in Revolution: Russian Avant-Garde Stage Design* or the Early Twentieth Century Russian Theatre website:
<http://max.mmlc.northwestern.edu/~mdenner/Drama/plays/constructivist/constructivist.html>

moving wheels and windmills, and innovation that had an “ideological implication in that it reflected the attempt in real life to build the industrial bases of socialism with primitive methods” (Lodder 172).

This reassessment of the very nature of art as utility was inextricably linked with the socio-political developments of Russia during this period. This new ideological position ascending from earth to heaven rather than descending from heaven to earth (Marx and Engels, *On Literature and Art* 43) was grounded in the everyday and the industrial. The Constructivists saw worthwhile art as both reflecting and participating in the Revolution and the rejection of the Capitalist division of labour. Theirs was a distinctly urban art form and so of great use to MacColl’s explication of the British urban experience. Although MacColl’s sets are rarely as elaborate as in *The Magnanimous Cuckold*, he does almost instinctively employ Meyerhold’s basic set structure in his work. As suggested in Chapter One, his interest in bare, unadorned staging began during his early Manchester-based experimentations with agitprop before his exposure to the Constructivist movement which centralised the blank acting space as an inherent part of its aesthetic. As the Red Megaphones, MacColl and his group presented their theatre outside mills or docks, or on the steps of the public baths (Gorney and MacColl xxiii). The basic Constructivist sets had a lot in common with these outdoor spaces. Therefore, during his early experiments MacColl and Meyerhold unconsciously adopted analogous positions; both were exploring the possibilities of blank staging although, it must be noted, Meyerhold conducted his investigations during the 1920s rather than the 1930s. With the transition into indoor spaces, MacColl did not abandon the simplicity of structure he had enjoyed outside. His first experiment in *John Bullion* (1934) constituted three platforms of differing sizes and heights (2). By this date, MacColl was indubitably aware of the Constructivist movement from his studies of *New Movements in Theatre*:

It was through Mousinnac’s book that we had our first real introduction to Myerhold’s [sic] theatre and to some extent, at any rate, his ideas were to dominate much of our next production, *John Bullion* (Gorney and MacColl xxxiv).

John Bullion marked the company’s first foray into the Continental forms of Mousinnac’s book and the first intentional experiment with the Constructivist stage. A decade later, MacColl begins his story of *Johnny Noble* with a statement presenting the stage space, “a platform twenty-five feet by fifteen” and declaring that “on this dead stage we’ll make society appear” (38). Even later in his theatrical

career with plays such as *Landscape with Chimneys* and *The Other Animals*, MacColl places his actors upon a simple Constructivist stage. He does not suppose that a complex narrative inextricably connected with a specific place (Salford in the former and a prison in the latter) necessitates painted scenery or tangible visual references to location. Instead, place is denoted through basic props or dialogue. In the opening discussion of *Landscape with Chimneys*, which considers the nature of the stage, the Stage Manager asks the audience to “imagine that this platform is a street where eight tenths of the population of this sceptred isle live out their lives” (3). Like Meyerhold, MacColl’s stage is merely a “platform” without any additional adornment, a space in which to display and perform. Surviving pictures of Theatre Workshop’s productions of MacColl’s plays illustrate this. The set for the company’s production of MacColl’s *Operation Olive Branch* in 1953 was constructed with platforms of varying sizes, positioned at right angles to one another in order to create steps. Stage right contains a connected sloping surface leading from the highest platform which is dominated by two pillars.⁵⁰ *The Other Animals* was presented on a similar platform stage with a circular cage structure on a raised platform at the centre, to elevate the figure of Hanau. Across the back of the stage the company placed a large scaffold structure with vertical bars to represent the prison.⁵¹

There are also similarities here with the project of Erwin Piscator. MacColl acknowledges the influence of Piscator, particularly in his version of *Good Soldier Schweik*, but also in his general theatrical aesthetic (MacColl, *Grassroots* 63). Mousinnac included a selection of photographs of Piscator’s work. Of particular note are the basic platform set of *Schweik* and the complex revolving hemisphere of *Rasputin* (Mousinnac plates 41-43, 45). Piscator’s use of the platform was, in a similar manner to Meyerhold’s, a political challenge. He declares that “we banned the word *art* radically from our program, our ‘plays’ were appeals and were intended to have an effect on current events, to be a form of political activity” (Piscator 45).

The platform stage was, of course, from the earliest incarnation of Theatre Workshop, The Red Megaphones, a practical necessity. The company had few

⁵⁰ See Leach. *Theatre Workshop* 190 for a published example of this set. This picture is also included in Goorney’s *Theatre Workshop Story*.

⁵¹ See Holdsworth, *Joan Littlewood* 20 for a published example of this set. Both these pictures are available at the Theatre Royal, Stratford East Archive.

funds and the agitprop productions were presented on steps or from the back of carts. Both the lack of formal funding and the need to retain a malleable method of staging consistently impact on Theatre Workshop's aesthetic. Funding and space were to remain practical restrictions for many radical theatre companies. One of the most noticeable ways of overcoming such restrictions can be seen twenty years or so later in 7:84's production *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil* which toured in the Highlands. For the tour Glasgow artist John Byrne constructed a "giant pop-up book, like children's pop-up books, only eight feet deep and ten across, made from strengthened cardboard. As you turn each page, a fresh 'set' pops up from in between the pages" (McGrath, *Naked Thoughts* 66). Indeed, although lack of financial support and absence of an established theatrical space have consistently created difficulties for politically engaged groups, these restrictions also give a company a certain flexibility and stimulus to experiment that the traditional stage could not afford. It requires the company to discover creative methods of overcoming such limitations and points to the economic issues that daily impact on the theatre company and the working class more generally. Theatre is no longer a higher form of labour; art is not rarefied as something spiritual and disconnected from the everyday. Indeed, much like Piscator, Meyerhold referred to his work in *Magnanimous Cuckold* as "industrial anti-art" (Braun 170) thereby directly associating theatre with the labour process. Theatre does not have to pretend that it is somehow unaware of the socio-economic struggles of the working class individual; indeed by contrast it has to participate in them. Seemingly MacColl's decision to maintain the platform stage was an active theatrical decision based on aesthetic and political convictions in conjunction with a practical imperative.

In addition to the Constructivist stages that permeate his work, MacColl also cites Swiss stage designer Adolphe Appia as a major influence from an early point in his career (Samuel et al. 247). Appia's experiments reveal a marked break with conventional methods of staging that had become common practice, particularly in opera which was Appia's prime concern. Like MacColl, he rejected painted backdrops and elaborate staging techniques, asserting that these forms of art are by nature immovable and static (Appia, *Man is the Measure of all things* 125). This creates a hindrance to communication and audience understanding, as the theatre should be focused on the performance of actors who, unlike painted canvas, are real, moving and alive; therefore "as soon as the actors make their entrance, the handsomest painted setting suddenly turns into an ineffectual combination of

painted canvases" (Appia, *Music* 23). This is a problem for any stage technician and remains a recurring difficulty to be overcome in MacColl's own work and in the production techniques of Theatre Workshop more generally. In his discussion of Appia's innovations, Lee Simonson argues cogently that "the painted illusion of the third dimension, valid in the painted picture where it can evoke both space and mass, is immediately negated when it is set on a stage where the third dimension is real" (Bentley ed. 30). The backdrops therefore do not help the actors in the performance or the audience in their comprehension of the theatrical presentation, and can, indeed, prove to be obstacles, as actual existence and landscapes need not and indeed cannot be reproduced exactly and accurately on the stage with canvas and paint. Edward Gordon Craig, an admirer of Appia, maintains that the stage-manager should never attempt to "imprison or copy nature, for nature will be neither imprisoned nor allow any man to copy her with success" (Craig 161).⁵²

Appia's problem—how to find an alternative to outworn methods—is therefore comparable to MacColl's; how can a scene be effectively related to the audience without the use of unconvincing illusionist techniques? Appia's resolution of his problem is discovered in the employment of lighting techniques as a system of signification:

The dramatist-stage-director is a painter whose palette should be *living*; his hand should be guided in the choice of living colors, their mixture, their arrangement, by the actor" (Appia, *Work* 37).

The focus changes from the architectural modes of denotation to a visual effect that is as mobile and living as the actors themselves; rather than distracting the audience or creating ineffective illusory sets, the stage becomes a space that enables the actor to present the narrative proficiently. The employment of lighting techniques is not a modern innovation. From the "vast open-air theatres" (Hartnoll 16) of the ancient Greeks which allowed the sunlight to illuminate the stage to the first use of candles, oil lamps, gas and, later, electricity, light has remained a constant preoccupation for stage-designers. However, Simonson intimates the uniqueness of Appia's project, proposing that, although the stage has always been obliged to be illuminated, it was not until the advent of Appia's theories that the latent potential was fully realised:

⁵² There is a suggestion that MacColl and the company were aware of Gordon Craig's work; as early as 1935 MacColl gave lectures to a training class, "long, incoherent, disquisitions larded with quotations from Aristotle, Diderot, Goethe, Gordon Craig, Richter, Appia and Stanislavski" (Goorney and MacColl xxxvii)

“the modern stage is filled with the light that was always to be seen on land and sea but never in the theatre until Appia brought it there” (Bentley 39).

Rather than dismiss light as an obvious necessity, Appia argues that light can be categorised. All these varieties of lighting effects can be seen in Theatre Workshop’s aesthetic and impact upon the presentation of MacColl’s plays. Firstly, he argues, there is “diffused light” (*Music* 76) which allows for visibility. Diffused light is evidently vital to the actualisation of theatre, as the action must be easily visible in order that the audience may observe the actor’s gestures. Ultimately, the theatre is a visual art and it is imperative that the audience is not detracted by lack of diffused light. The second form of light Appia indicates is “living light” which expresses certain specific scenes, such as night or the supernatural (ibid.). Diffused light illuminates the stage space while living light illuminates a specific place or indicates particular time and weather within the theatrical narrative. Living light can also create a sense of atmosphere, proposing romance or danger, or denoting the emotions of the characters. A prime example can be seen at the beginning of the Fifth Picture of Toller’s *Masses Man* when the stage directions suggest that “grey dawn creeps through the window. Platform lit by gloomy light” (164). The conclusion of this picture presents the disruption of the workers’ meeting by soldiers. Machine gun is heard and the Woman is shackled; it is the final act of a tense scene that began with a sense of foreboding created by the dim lighting. Both of these varieties of light (diffused and living) are readily perceptible in MacColl’s written playtexts. For example, the opening scene of *Johnny Noble*, begins with the narrators illuminated by two spotlights; ‘diffused light’ allows the audience to recognise the first two performers. The ‘diffused light’ is intensified as the “acting-area flood fades up, discovering three youths playing pitch-and-toss upstage centre” (36). However, the scene is then interrupted as the Second Narrator introduces the screaming factories:

A red spot is faded up discovering a half-naked figure of a man. He mimes raking out a furnace in time to machinery (36). This example of ‘living light’ draws attention to two of the primary themes of this play, labour and unemployment, and, in the use of red light creates an image of industry. MacColl uses ‘living light’ in a similar manner as Eugene O’Neill in *The Hairy Ape* (1922) when Mildred visits the stokehole where Yank is working.

In addition to diffused and living light, in MacColl’s work, the playwright also incorporates Appia’s theory of shadow into his plays. Shadow is an inevitable

by-product of light. It is the antithesis of light and is yet inextricably bound up with it; the introduction of light onto a stage produces shadow elsewhere in the theatrical space. However, shadow can also be employed as a stage effect in its own right (Appia, *Music* 74). MacColl's engagement with Appia's theories began during the production of *Newsboy* in 1933. A member of the group, Alf Armitt, researched the Swiss technician, and provided both a theoretical basis to which MacColl remained indebted throughout his theatrical career and a practical outworking of these ideas in the form of a "ten-pound barrel-type biscuit-tins fitted with 500-watt lamps 'borrowed' from the floodlighting equipment used to illuminate the Salford greyhound-racing track" (Goorney and MacColl xxxi). Later he utilises all three of these lighting techniques to particular effect in *The Other Animals* (1947).

The stage of *The Other Animals* is a place of shadows from which dancers and the images of the prisoner, Robert Hanau's, mind emanate. Theatre Workshop under the direction of Joan Littlewood initially produced this play in Manchester Library Theatre in 1948 (Leach, *Theatre Workshop* 57), later taking it to the Edinburgh People's Festival in 1949. It remained in Theatre Workshop's repertoire for a number of years (Goorney and MacColl lvii). This play focuses on the dual themes of repression and emancipation. It is a play of dualisms: the dissident prisoner Hanau and the image of the hegemony, the doctor Graubard; the beauty of freedom and truth, and the deformities of the authoritarian regime; revolution and the stagnant status quo; an ever-increasing light and the gradually diminishing darkness. The predominant backdrop is a prison⁵³, suggested not only by the structural presence of the cage itself but also by the darkness which perpetually envelops the stage. The horrors of the oppressive prison are reflected by the presence of shadow. The cage remains a constant presence; however, during the course of the play, it appears to expand and reduce in size. This effect is created by

⁵³ The cage is a constant image throughout left-wing political theatre as a symbolic representation of repression. It is a noticeable inclusion in the early agitprop work *Meerut* produced by WTM in which the cage is created by the actors with sticks and signifies the subjugation of their "comrades" in India (www.wcml.org.uk/internat/meerut_play.htm). The cage ultimately represents a prison incarcerating those who would challenge the hegemony. MacColl is certainly not alone in his focus on this image. Ernst Toller's *Hoppla, We're Alive* (1927) begins with a prison scene and, earlier, Kokoschka's deeply disturbing *Murderer Hope of Womankind* (1907) contains the stage direction "She creeps round the cage. Grabs compulsively for the grille. Threatens with her fist" (Ritchie and Garten eds. 29). Outwith the Expressionist canon but remaining within the drama of the political left-wing, Upton Sinclair sets his play *Singing Jailbirds* (1924) inside a prison. Indeed, there are certain similarities between MacColl's *The Other Animals* and Sinclair's play, and I suspect that MacColl's play was influenced by the American's work. This speculation is certainly possible, as MacColl acted in *Singing Jailbirds* in 1929 with the Clarion Players (Samuel et al. 223).

use of light and shadow. In the opening scene, the cage is illuminated by a single spotlight beam (133), but by the beginning of Part Two it appears “to have increased its floor area and the shadows cast by the bars radiate over the stage like a great spider’s web” (176) becoming an all-encompassing presence that reflects the dominance of the hegemony and the prison that symbolically represents the repression of those who oppose the authorities. The effect of the cage as a visual, material device is markedly intensified by the deployment of light and shadow.

In Ernst Toller’s play *Transformation* the playwright exhibits a similar device in his introduction of Friedrich’s patriotic statue. Toller suggests that the statue should be illuminated with “sunbeams” (88). The seemingly pleasurable lighting effect is presented in sharp contrast to both Friedrich’s state of mind and the gradual collapse of his utopian assessment of the First World War as a noble battle for the Fatherland. The light draws attention to the statue, but also to more profound political thematic concerns. MacColl likewise utilises light to elucidate theme. For example, the death of Hanau in *The Other Animals* is seemingly a pessimistic conclusion to a play that has advocated the need to challenge the authoritarian system. The consequence of resistance appears to be death. However, with specific and sustained reference to light, MacColl is able to create a sense of hope. Whereas Graubard, the autocratic doctor can see only shadows, the chorus of the dead declare that “the shadows fly before the rush of light./ The sun destroys the ambush of the night” (196). The light, representing those who actively resist the hegemony and achieve the victory, causes the darkness to evaporate. Eventually Graubard is left to inhabit his own dark cage in “this grey silence” while mourning the fact that Hanau has usurped his position: “the light behind your eyes was mine” (197). The dramatic text with its constant references to light and dark, and the performative actualisation of the text, particularly the final scene in which the light appears to follow Robert and Morning off the stage leaving Graubard in the increasingly darkening cage (197), combine to produce an impression of hope in spite of the darkness that pervades.

However, MacColl’s association with Appia’s theories is not entirely unproblematic. Appia’s project is not, unlike MacColl’s, to advocate a certain socio-political position within his art; Appia’s work is not pedagogical in the same manner as MacColl’s. For Appia, music becomes the “supreme corrective and regulator” (Appia, *Work* 22) in an Aristotelian sense; the theatrical experience is consistently cathartic. Evidently MacColl would reject this. Although, like Brecht,

he frequently encourages an emotional response to his work, the response is always in conjunction with reason. MacColl requires the intellect of his audience and a reasoned interaction with the primary premises of the production. Emotion empty of reason is regarded as a form of anaesthesia. Equally problematic for political playwrights is Appia's association with Wagner. Theodor Adorno refers to Wagner as a "willing prophet and diligent lackey of imperialism and late-bourgeois terrorism" (Adorno, *Wagner* 154). Adorno suggests that beyond the façade of his music is a reactionary force, repressing individuality and transgression of the hegemony; "the greater the progress in the technicization of the work of art, the rational planning of its method and hence its effects, the more anxiously is Wagner intent upon making his music appear spontaneous, immediate and natural and upon concealing the controlling will" (Adorno, *Wagner* 50). Adorno's conclusion is that Wagner's music consistently presents an illusion; it casts a "magic spell" (Adorno, *Wagner* 101) interpolating the audience into a dream world of idealism. Wagner advocates an "organically united" work of art capable of synthesising all aspects of performance into one integrated whole (*Music* 132).

In spite of Adorno's suggestions, MacColl evidently had a certain admiration for Wagner, citing him as an influence and concluding that, through an extension of agitprop, Theatre Workshop had to "create a theatre of synthesis in which the actors will be able to sing, dance and act with equal facility" (Samuel et al. 242). However, MacColl's plays do not resemble the Wagnerian epic model but the Brechtian epic one. Brecht suggests that if Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* is employed in the theatre, all the separate arts will be lost in a synthesised whole, which will merely immerse the audience in the play and produce an empathetic emotional response rather than a more detached inspection of the thematic concerns presented upon the stage (Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre* 204). MacColl actually produces a theatre that engages with a variety of different arts that *retain* their autonomy. The inclusion of a variety of art works such as music or dance does not engender Wagnerian synthesis; rather it enables the playwright to discuss the political issues involved through an assortment of different methods. The interruption of one artistic form with another is another example of the epic V-Effekt and causes the audience to reappraise the action; it creates a metatheatrical effect, challenges illusion and enables the actors, often in conjunction with the stage set, to demonstrate rather than perform in a conventional sense. This is evident throughout MacColl's artistic canon from the song *Which Side Are You On?* in *Landscape with Chimneys* to the nuclear fission ballet of *Uranium 235* (109) to the

sculpture-like cage structure in *The Other Animals*. Theatre becomes a melange of styles, genres and disciplines which retain their individuality while at the same time adding to the entertainment-value and interest of the piece. Rather than present art that is seemingly entirely unaware of its identity as creation, as a manufactured object, avant-garde art predominantly “proclaims itself an artificial construct, an artefact” (Bürger 72) and in this respect MacColl is a consistent avant-gardist.

MacColl actively promotes his own indigenous avant-garde aesthetic through the employment of new technical initiatives. According to Dietrich Scheunemann the avant-garde is characterised by an appropriation of innovative techniques, a “new technical media” (16), reflecting that photography and film in particular reveal a new artistic fascination with scientific advancements. MacColl can be seen as drawing on this tradition. Indeed, he employed back-projection in his adaptation of Hašek’s novel *The Good Soldier Schweik* (Gorney and MacColl xlii). Lighting and sound effects can also be placed within this category. This is, of course, not a new suggestion as Walter Benjamin in his essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936) long ago suggested that technical advances could liberate a work of art and add to the creative process. He affirms that “technical reproduction can put the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach from the original itself” (Benjamin, *Work of Art* 283). This is true not only of art *per se* (the painting, the sculpture) but also of objects that could be regarded as art, “the cathedral leaves its locale to be received in the studio of a lover of art” (ibid). MacColl suggests that the company used light and sound as “décor” (Woods, *Folk Review* June 1973 4), as a means of furnishing the stage. He was not alone in his innovative use of sound; Kaiser’s play, *The Raft of the Medusa* (1945) begins with the stage direction “as it is night, only the noise and the light reveal the work of destruction” (Kaiser, *Plays: volume two* 175): the torpedoing of the boat is revealed only through this ‘décor’ light and sound. The most pertinent example of an innovative, technically advanced *mise en scène* in MacColl’s canon can be seen in the production of *The Travellers* (1952) which combined a Constructivist stage with sound and light in order to create a particular vivid impression. The recorded sound of train gives the impression that the ‘train’ is speeding up and is used for particular effect at times of great tension or revelation. For example, the noise increases when Katherine finds out Lorentz is a spy (21) and after Stevens has shot Mehring (82). This is combined with an innovative deployment of Appia’s ‘living light’ theory. Particularly effective is the use of strobe lighting to denote a station which illuminates the final scene in which Maillard kills Eckert (87) and creates a

sense of danger. Goorney recalls that “using sound, light and the movements of the actors, we created the impression of a moving train, and the audience had the feeling of being involved as passengers on the journey, rather than as passive spectators” (Goorney 85). The train, as Benjamin would have it, leaves its locale and is transported by light and sound denotation into the theatrical sphere.

MacColl’s staging techniques, originating in his own early experiments in agitprop and, later, inspired by Mousinnac’s plates and Appia’s writings, incorporating elements of Constructivism and Symbolism, consistently reflect his aim to revolutionise the theatrical methods of denoting place. Indeed, the Stage Manager in *Landscape with Chimneys* rejects such visual indications as unnecessary:

We have not insulted your intelligence or your powers of observation by attempting to teach you with forced perspective or by presenting an imitation street of canvas flats (3).

MacColl’s stage engenders an active participation from the audience. It is metatheatre that requires a certain level of imaginative interaction. Through this MacColl seeks to proclaim his political convictions, and encourage his audience to question, engage and participate.

iii “Art with a capital ‘A’”: narrative style, linguistic experiment and character building.

In order to maintain this new form of metatheatrical realism, a matter of presentation rather than imitation, the plays demanded an equally innovative method of narration. In order to construct his narrative MacColl incorporates the Expressionist narrative style into his work. The Expressionists, playwrights such as Toller, Kaiser, Kokoschka and Goll amongst others reject the Aristotelian chronological narrative mode and instead create drama that entirely disregards linear progression. MacColl’s dismissal of the restrictions of chronological unity begins with his initial experimentation within the agitprop form and remains prominent in his Living Newspaper *Last Edition*, in which scenes narrating the Spanish Civil War could be combined with others explaining the Munich Pact. Likewise, Expressionist plays are fragmented collections of happenings, a series of autonomous scenes which are seemingly disconnected from the previous and subsequent episodes. As Walter Sokel relates “the physical stage, the protagonist’s

environment, ceases to be a fixed frame of a scene or act" (Sokel, *Writer in Extremis* 38). Toller's play *Transformation* represents this modification in the basic format of drama.

The play opens with Toller's declaration that the prologue could also be thought of as an epilogue (57), thereby deconstructing the generally accepted beginning-to-end construct. The body of the play is written in a fragmented style as a collection of pictures, reminiscent of the religious *Stationendrama*, a vibrant and dynamic compilation of individual scenes (Ritchie 18): a "play in which a succession of episodes replaces a continuously developing action. Implied in the term is an analogy to the depictions of the Stations of the Cross" (Garland 794). Subsequently, interactions between Friedrich and his family (Picture One) can be interspersed with grotesque images of maimed and dying soldiers (Pictures Two, Four, Six). There is no compulsion to explain the transition from one scene to the next or to include connecting episodes. Aristotle asserts that the playwright "must connect the various incidents in such a way that the whole will be disjoined and dislocated if any one of them is transposed or removed" (17); Toller rejects this Aristotelian notion of the whole and thereby creates a narrative of fragmentation. The discarding of the restrictions of chronology provides Expressionist artists with a freedom and MacColl, after discovering the restrictions of theatre through practical experiment and after reading some of the major critiques of twentieth-century theatrical developments (and presumably after the Manchester version of Toller's *Draw the Fires*) echoes this need to emancipate the theatre from the confines of linear chronological construction:

what we really needed was to create a form which was infinitely flexible, which would make it possible for us to move backwards and forwards in time and space as say, with a film, and which could accommodate improvisations (Goorney and MacColl 1).

The connection here with film is a beneficial one. MacColl's plays are consistently structured as if they are films, combining scenes together without the restrictions of time or space. The plays' structures therefore often resemble not only the *Stationendrama* style of Toller, but also the montage films of Eisenstein. MacColl's interest in Eisenstein and the Russian filmmakers began in the late 1920s and continued through his involvement with the Salford Workers' Film Society, of which he was a founder member in 1930 (Goorney and MacColl xvi). Montage "espoused the cause of freeing the theatre from strict adherence to the linear and sequential cause-effect progression" (Symons 116). It provided a freedom from the

conventions of linear narrative and, instead, decreed that the essence of a film emerges 'in the sequential juxtaposition of its constituent "frames"' (Eisenstein 80), a series of episodes, or "attractions" (Bordwell 6).

MacColl utilises these narrative conventions of the *Stationendrama* and montage in *The Other Animals*. The initial incarceration of the rebel prisoner Robert Hanau is a self-contained fragment, as is the depiction of a train containing a variety of characters who fail to comprehend the critical nature of the socio-political situation⁵⁴. MacColl is not required to remain in the same imaginative space or to present transition; these scenes can be juxtaposed without the constraints of linear narrative; "the old structural principle of causal interrelation between character, incident, and action gives way to a new structural pattern, closer to music than to drama" (Sokel, *Anthology* xiv). Sokel's association of music and drama is particularly intriguing when one considers Joan Littlewood's suggestion that *The Other Animals* was inspired by Mahler's *Resurrection Symphony*⁵⁵ (Littlewood, *Joan's Book* 310); for MacColl the arrangement of musical scores based around a central theme but with distinct movements and the juxtaposition of melodies, reflects the stylistic objectives of his theatre. The Expressionist painter Wassily Kandinsky wrote a remarkable piece of theatre entitled *The Yellow Sound* which he referred to as a "stage composition" (Kandinsky 201). The piece contains sharp contrasts between the voices and the music, and periods of silence interspersed with "noisy turbulence" (216). This theatre is seemingly an amalgamation of painting and music. MacColl's *The Other Animals* is styled in a similar manner, from the tapping of the prisoners on the pipes and the crescendo of voices (135) to the entrance of the insane which culminates in a freeze-frame directly resembling a static painting (166). It is a play of both visual and acoustic art.

"Expressionist drama is theme-centred rather than plot- or conflict-centred" (Sokel, *Anthology* xv). Rather than linked by a linear plot, Expressionist drama is structured around a theme rather like a symphony with movements. Toller

⁵⁴ The image of the train carrying ignorant people towards war is employed again in his 1952 play *The Travellers*. In this play the train is an ever-present image of the relentless progression towards war. The passengers remain entirely unaware of the danger of the situation and, until their collective consciousness is gradually awakened, the characters' concerns remain focused on their own individual needs. The final scene narrates their decision to work together to stop the train and to prevent war.

⁵⁵ There are specific references to Mahler in the play itself. MacColl writes in the stage directions, "a simple childish theme is introduced but still in dance tempo rather like the 'Henry Martin' theme in Mahler's First Symphony" (155). Perhaps the 'Henry Martin' theme to which MacColl refers is the central motif commonly known as 'Frère Jacques'.

constructs *Transformation* in a similar manner; however, his theme is war and an alternative view of world at peace. Friedrich's ascent up the mountain, his creation of a sculpture (and his ultimate destruction of it) and the vivid images of maimed soldiers culminate in Friedrich's cry that "the State [is] a pimp and the Fatherland a trampled whore who sells herself to every brutal lust" (90). This is the crux of the play and each individual episode relates to it. A similar structure can be seen in Expressionist plays such as Kaiser's *From Morning to Midnight* (1917) in which the episodic composition has the single theme of the regeneration of man. The same process is perceptible within *The Other Animals*. Hanau's imprisonment, Robert's wanderings, the inclusion of Hanau's friends, the episode on the train and the eventual internment of Graubard all create an image of an old world diminishing and "the new world that is being born" (194). This is a beneficial convention for a playwright such as MacColl who aspires to communicate a particular theme to his audience rather than integrate it into a 'story'.

This dramatic style also facilitates the inclusion of both 'real' and abstract scenes and images. In *Transformation*, Toller shifts from the quasi-naturalism of the military hospital in the Fifth Picture, in which Friedrich lies wounded and is addressed by an army officer who states that "victory sweeps our country, and you belong to it" (77), to the visionary image of the symbolic factory/prison of the Eighth and Ninth Pictures. A similar juxtaposition of actual and abstract occurs in *The Other Animals*. The play transfers rapidly from symbolic poetry to mundane dialogue. The first prison scene opens with a conversation between two guards who discuss the odour of the prison as they carry Hanau back to his cell (135-136). It is a recognisable, easily decipherable exchange. However, the previous scene has combined music and disembodied poetic voices to explain the pre-eminence of man in creation, and his intelligence and superior moral attributes, stating that he is characterised by "the light behind the eyes,/ the dream behind the fact" (135). Later in the play the conversation between Robert and the passengers on the train is preceded by the "Mic. Voice's" recording of the deaths of certain individuals who participated in the class struggle:

James Guthrie, weaver: died in the struggle for the Charter, eighteen-hundred-and-forty (180).

MacColl does not indulge in emotional description or vivid symbolism here; the people are referred to factually as a register or a tomb stone inscription. This is not unique to MacColl's Expressionistic play, but is a technique that remains prominent even in his more naturalistic dramas. For example, in *Johnny Noble* the Mic. voice

asserts, "November 1931. The unemployed on the north-east coast are marching" (45). Although MacColl wrote only one overt Expressionistic piece, many of his other plays, including the more naturalistic *Johnny Noble* and *Landscape with Chimneys*, contain moments of metatheatrical declamation; a technique originating in his experimentation in the Living Newspaper form and later informed by his readings of Expressionism.

The conclusion of *The Other Animals* is an amalgamation of music, dance and verse-speech, which combine to produce an abstract image of the future as a place of hope, "a new constellation" (196). With the advent of the *Stationendrama* and montage structures, MacColl is able to combine not just scenes of recognisable events and conversations, but also sequences of abstraction that serve the play's general theme. Kandinsky asserts that "between the purely abstract and the purely real composition lies possibilities of combining abstract and real elements in the picture" (180). This proclamation relates directly to visual art, and especially to his own paintings mid-career, but Kandinsky's own experimentations with the theatrical genre would suggest that such a melange of styles could be applied just as readily to the dramatic form. MacColl consistently pursues this in his theatrical aesthetic.

However, language as such is not devalued in the process. Language and the linguistic presentation of ideas were of integral importance in the Theatre Workshop aesthetic. The company received specific training in pronunciation and diction from Australian language coach Nelson Illingworth. Littlewood relates that "there we were every morning, singing, chanting, producing pure vowels and throwing consonants into them like straws into a stream (Littlewood, *Joan's Book* 203). Illingworth maintained that in the production of an audible statement, the actor must utilise every aspect of his/her physical form, that "sound was produced by the whole body, not simply the larynx" (Leach, *Theatre Workshop* 90). The audience should be able to fully comprehend the spoken words of the actors and the actors should feel comfortable while vocalising the script. MacColl personally remained profoundly convinced of the centrality of language throughout his theatrical career. He recalls that "the problem I was sure lay in language itself" and he aimed to create a "new theory of dramatic poetry" (Orr and O'Rourke Part Four) that could elucidate and engage with the working-class experience.

But perhaps as the fruit of MacColl's preoccupation with Expressionism, the language of his plays were not straightforward and easily decipherable. Illingworth may well have advised the company in appropriate methods of enunciation and intonation, but MacColl's writing remained, at times, enigmatic, full of abstract images and vivid symbols. In MacColl's play abstraction is negotiated both visually (through light and sound upon a platform stage) and linguistically. Joan Littlewood suggests that "the writing was often dazzling, so dazzling that it tended to obscure the meaning" (Littlewood, *Joan's Book* 311). The grammar, syntax and text of *The Other Animals* are complex, combining poetic verse, plain diction and dense linguistic description. Much of his text creates vibrant images of the despotic hegemonic regime personified by Graubard or of a utopian state of freedom engendered by political revolution. There is a marked similarity here between MacColl's text and a play by the German Expressionist Reinhard Sorge, *The Beggar* (1912). There is no evidence to suggest that MacColl was aware of Sorge's play and there are perceptible differences (Sorge regarded death as the only method of achieving freedom); but there are also noticeable parallels in their works. Sorge's Poet asserts that "one day I shall stretch up defiantly toward blue sun/ An eagle/ I shall spread my wings/ Toward the fire of the sun" (Sokel, *Anthology* 46). In *The Other Animals* Hanau maintains that "we have lived through a long night/ But now the sun stands poised and ready/ On the furthest ridge of Capricorn" (188). Both Sorge and MacColl use language to present a vivid image of the future, utilising the sun as a symbol of expectancy and impending transformation. There are many irreconcilable differences between Sorge's play and *The Other Animals*, and yet the use of Expressionist symbol and technique seemingly unites them.

Lukács suggests that "we see that modernism leads not only to the destruction of traditional literary forms; it leads to the destruction of literature as such" (Lukács, *Contemporary Realism* 45). The essence of literature, he argues, is disassembled by artistic genres such as Expressionism: language itself disintegrates. And indeed, the language of the Expressionists is habitually complex and fragmented, often combining abstract descriptions and images together. For a playwright intent on communicating a political message of emancipation and revolution to a working-class audience with little knowledge of German theatre, the inclusion of such convoluted text may appear somewhat curious. His reaction to critics of *The Other Animals* was that "symphonies were listened to more than once, and that anyone who found it interesting but difficult could always see it again"

(Goorney 68). This reflects both the musical associations of this play (with the influence of Mahler perhaps), and MacColl's notion that the audience should be compelled to make an effort in order to understand the work. MacColl's use of Expressionist conventions, particularly his abstract linguistic style, encourages his audience to adopt an analytical role. Such language requires audience interpretation and deciphering, engaging each member with the performance on the stage.

However, it is clear that MacColl's choice of language is not solely to compel the audience to participate in the presentation, but also reveals an aspiration to bring poetry to the working class. After a production of *Johnny Noble/ The Flying Doctor* in Kendal, MacColl declared that it was his intention to create "Art with a capital 'A': we have not weakened in our determination to create a thing of power and beauty" (MacColl, *Journeyman* 247). MacColl's dual objectives were to create a theatre of political power and creative beauty. Language was integral to this project. He consistently maintained that the working class deserved a theatre of artistic originality and beauty. In response to a successful production of *Uranium 235* at Butlin's Holiday Camp in Filey in 1946, the company concluded that "there was no necessity to play down or compromise when faced with a working-class audience" (Goorney 53). MacColl never presumed that his audience could only manage basic dialogue, and sought to familiarise it with the poetic form. He insisted that the working class deserved poetry. In his preoccupation with poetry, the manipulation and composition of language, MacColl's project is reminiscent of the undertakings of other artists. For example, T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* is characterised by its complex poetic style and imagery. In concluding a poem of spectacular linguistic play, one of the voices in the final collage declares "these fragments I have shored against my ruins". In attempting to comprehend the modern world, Eliot has constructed a work of fragments, conjoined by his own imagination. MacColl's plays, particularly *The Other Animals* with its complicated syntax and language, are constructed as a series of fragments in a similar way to Eliot's poem. In much of the work associated with the modernist movement in theatre, the inclusion of poetic language is evident, for instance in a play such as Stephen Spender's *Trial of a Judge*. There the Two Red Prisoners assert that "the chainless freedom of our will/Burns towards the light" (111). The similarity of Spender's imagery with MacColl's own is marked; MacColl describes the "disc of sun in the mist of morning" (197) and the "shadows [that] fly before the rush of light" (196). Although there is no direct suggestion of an alignment with the modernist movement as represented by the plays staged by the Group Theatre, there

are undoubtedly parallels. MacColl began his writing career with poetry (MacColl, *Journeyman* 107), albeit by his own admission fairly poor poetry. This preoccupation with language remains readily discernible in his plays.

In addition, MacColl's theatrical experimentations also reassess the figure of the actor. This is particularly evident in *The Other Animals*. Centring the play on one character is a chief characteristic of the Expressionist form as is evident in plays as diverse as Toller's *Transformation*, which focuses on the psyche of central protagonist Friedrich, and Georg Kaiser's *From Morning to Midnight*, which narrates the experiences of the Cashier who searches for meaning and destination. On entering a Salvation Army Hall in which several individuals are recalling their own experiences, Kaiser's Cashier asserts that he will recount "my own story. My own story" (Kaiser, *Five Plays* 69). Mel Gordon refers to the method of Expressionistic acting as the "Ich performance", "focused on the central performer" (Gordon, M, *Expressionist Acting* 42). In *The Other Animals* Hanau/Robert remains the principal point of interest for the audience. Walter Sokel reflects that the Expressionist protagonist is a 'Christ'-figure and that "the other 'characters' are not so much characters as functions is his mission or martyrdom" (Sokel, *Anthology* xx). In Britain this figure has been integral to the tradition of late-medieval morality drama. However, MacColl, developing the Expressionistic focus on the individual, also introduces other characters, all of which are remarkably distinctive. Graubard, in spite of fulfilling a bourgeois representational role, is a character with a name, often unusual in Expressionist plays. He also has a job which necessitates his interaction with Hanau but is not confined to it; he notifies the guards that "the prisoners in this wing are necessary to my work" (139). Graubard is not defined solely in relation to Hanau. The figures on the train, Piera, Gaudry and Guthrie, all of whom have perished in their fight for freedom, are also rounded characters with a history. In contrast to a play such as Toller's *Masses Man* (1921), in which the Woman represents the consistent revolutionary whereas the Husband denotes a spirit of resignation to the prevailing order of things, MacColl regards individuality as important among his working-class characters.⁵⁶ His plays contain characters that are simultaneously individualised (with a historical and social context), and representational (embodying bourgeois oppression or working-class heroism). The

⁵⁶ Toller's play *Hoppla* also introduces a variety of individualised characters with identifiable names from the prison, so MacColl is not unique in his development of the Expressionist form in this way. However, with few exceptions, the Expressionists employ representational characterisation rather than develop individual personalities.

dialectic this sets up is evident throughout MacColl's plays, and is often the cause of a play's artistic success.⁵⁷

This focus on the individual necessitates a focus on the psyche, on the interior workings of the human mind. One of the staples of the Expressionistic form is the inclusion of dream sequences, explicitly centralising subjectivity within the dramatic text. Ernst Toller's play *Masses Man* is written in 'pictures' some of which he refers to as "visionary abstracts of reality" and to some as "dream pictures" (xi). He is therefore able to combine a symbolic representation of a cage in the Sixth Picture (a dream) with the conversation between the husband and wife in Picture One (abstract of reality). Dreams become a vital aspect of the Expressionist project⁵⁸ and Hanau's consciousness is constantly represented through dream in *The Other Animals*. MacColl suggests that the appearance of his friends Maria, Anderson and Rolf "should have the quality of a dream, which indeed it is, the dancers being merely creations of the prisoner's delirium" (141). This dream reveals Hanau's "inner necessity" as he regresses into madness and begins to accept his dreams as reality.

The emphasis on the essence of the central figure often results in a sustained study of hallucination and mental sickness. The individual within the Expressionist genre is often represented as distorted and fragmented, rather like the forms of the plays themselves. In *The Other Animals* Hanau, the protagonist is visually split into two by the inclusion of his alter ego, Robert, Hanau's "divided self" (147).⁵⁹ The stage is inhabited by two distinct figures who collectively declaim the essence of the character. Robert represents the consciousness and is able to escape the incarceration of the cage whereas the physical, consistently represented by the

⁵⁷ There are many examples of this. Adamson represents the labouring poor in *Hell is What You Make It*, but he is also an individual with circumstances and background. The same is true for a character such as Johnny Noble, who remains a distinct character through the play and yet is also "representing the pipe-dreamers" (65).

⁵⁸ MacColl does not however restrict his dream sequences to his overtly Expressionist plays but includes them just as readily in his more Naturalistic constructions. Examples of this include Jessie's dreams about Hollywood and Swindel's success on the pools in *Landscape with Chimneys*.

⁵⁹ MacColl is certainly not the first playwright to place multiple figures on the stage to represent one character. Indeed, the Expressionist playwright Yvan Goll incorporated Freudian psychoanalytical theories into his 1922 play *Methusalem* by representing one character, the Student, by three masked figures. These figures wear identical masks and yet symbolise the same character's Ego, Id and Superego. This is made patently obvious by the actors who wear these terms on their hats (Ritchie and Garten eds. 92). Like Hanau and Robert who are able to converse with one another freely and audibly, the Student's Ego and Id have a fight while Superego talks with Ida (95).

caged figure of Hanau, must remain imprisoned. It is a palpable image of the fragmentation of the individual.

The individual's emotions are also exhibited visually within the Expressionist mode in the convention of the *Schrei*, the ecstatic moment of heightened emotion (Gordon, M. *Expressionist Acting* 45). The most famous example of the *Schrei* in the visual arts can be discerned in Edvard Munch's *The Scream* (1893), the lone figure crying out while the world around him seems to disintegrate and fragment. This image became a noticeable symbol in Expressionist drama. Sebastian in Yvan Goll's *The Immortal One* exhibits this convention early in the play revelling in the ecstasy of his emotions (Sokel, *Anthology* 267), as does Friedrich as he smashes the sculpture in *Transformation* and cries "*I'll smash you up, Victory of the Fatherland*" (91). Hanau also experiences the moment of the *Schrei*. He shrieks "Hanau is dead!/ They murdered him with voices"(158). The *Schrei* signifies a profound preoccupation with the individual psyche.

Writing from a Marxist point of view, one might expect MacColl to be less sympathetic to the Expressionist focus on the singular self. Indeed, Georg Lukács dismisses the prominence of the individual, particularly the distorted individual, in Expressionist plays, asserting that such specific and sustained focus on a single character creates an ahistorical protagonist entirely confined to the limits of his own individualism. Lukács argues that the Expressionistic central figure "does not develop through contact with the world; he neither forms nor is formed by it. The only 'development' in this literature is the gradual revelation of the human condition" (Lukács, *Contemporary Realism* 21). Lukács' dismissal of the Expressionist form is partly founded on this specific focus on the singular character, regarding it as representative of bourgeois individualism that neglects the material and economic realities of existence and is instead preoccupied with the private consciousness. In this Lukács' is seemingly elucidating the Communist position which argues that 'it is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness' (Marx and Engels, *On Literature and Art* 43). However, his presumption that the focus on a single character can only represent bourgeois individualism is wholly undermined by MacColl's use of this Expressionistic convention. The English playwright does not focus on the individual psyche because he is not concerned with the material world or because he regards a psychoanalytical approach as more beneficial than one rooted in socio-political actuality; rather he employs this Expressionistic practice in an innovative manner as

a means of confronting political concerns. In *The Other Animals*, Hanau's mental condition and the oppression that engenders it remain the playwright's primary concern. As the play progresses, the narrative style, the behaviour of other characters and even the lighting effects reflect the gradual fragmentation of Hanau's psyche. In this sense, MacColl's protagonist markedly resembles the Cashier in *From Morning to Midnight*. However, whereas the Cashier is only concerned with the articulation of his own private experiences, Hanau is created by and exclusively concerned with the external material and historical world. The Cashier retells "my own story" but Hanau's indictment of Graubard is that "you hate us because you envy us" (192); Kaiser's protagonist dies as an individual, terrorised by his own psyche, MacColl's central character by contrast recognises a sense of community in the political process and ultimately the victory of the dissidents. MacColl transforms this convention in order to create a figure that represents the class struggle and possibility of defeating the repressive hegemony. In much Expressionist writing the central figure is the New Man, a Messianic figure (Sokel, *Writer in Extremis* 172) who signifies a "revolution of the spirit" (Gordon, D 35) rather than any political transformation. This Messianic identity is certainly alluded to in *The Other Animals* as Hanau intimates that his body resembles a "tree that's twisted to a crooked cross": an obvious reference to Christ and redemption (142). But Hanau is inextricably associated with the political, representing an attitude and a class. Transformation remains a prominent theme but, rather than the "inner regeneration" (Sokel, *Writer in Extremis* 137) of many Expressionistic works, MacColl's protagonist points to "the new world that is being born" (194) through socio-political revolution.

iv Combining the arts: dance and movement

In addition to the reappraisal of the individual as dramatic subject, Expressionism also reassesses the traditional boundaries between generic artistic categories. The movement began in the visual arts (Furness 3) where painters experimented with abstract visions, arresting imagery of war or death, and a focus on the individual psyche. German Expressionist playwrights combined this focus on colour and image with music and physical action, lighting and sound to present a theatre that united many aspects of the dramatic experience and exploited them in a new way. During the early decades of the twentieth century, continental dramatists, theatrical designers and directors had experimented within these conventions, creating new relationships between actor, stage and audience. These movements,

and German Expressionism in particular, were characterised by a “cross-fertilization among the arts from painting and sculpture to music and mime” (Ritchie 156). A playwright could amalgamate many artistic genres within a single production (Willett, *Expressionism* 11). This traversing of generic borders is also discernible in Brecht’s developing aesthetic. Indeed, he creates a dramatic form that combines the most effective elements of diverse artistic genres. He holds that actors, stage-designers etc “unite their various arts for the joint operation, without of course sacrificing their independence in the process” (Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre* 202). Not that his compositions resemble the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* in which artistic disciplines merge to create an overall effect. Indeed, as mentioned above, epic theatre confronts “Wagnerian hypnosis”. Instead, each genre remains distinct and discernible. MacColl operates in a similar way. He consistently constructs his theatre using elements of dance, movement, music, art, and language. In his work, theatre as a genre has an assortment of different, interrelated facets; the staging, lighting, text, music, costume and gestures all operate concurrently to produce an overall dramatic effect. MacColl was consistently preoccupied with the interaction of different artistic genres as he constructed his urban British avant-garde. From his inclusion of dance to his constant incorporation of music⁶⁰, his plays reveal an intention to include many aspects of art in order to further his political message and produce entertaining theatre of creative distinction.

This approach is particularly evident in MacColl’s use of dance and movement. In his autobiography he reflects on the early development of Theatre Workshop’s aesthetic: “ever since *Newsboy* we had been conscious of a crippling need for movement training and we talked longingly of a theatre where the actors could handle their bodies like trained dancers or athletes” (MacColl, *Journeyman* 254). The company progressed in this area through practical experimentation and through engagement with the ideas of Meyerhold, Dalcroze and Laban.

Meyerhold recognised that the lack of architectural illusion in Constructivist theatre compelled the audience to focus on the figure of the actor; therefore he duly proposed his theory of biomechanics. This method taught the individual actors how to move in harmony with themselves, the theatrical space and their fellow actors. Meyerhold suggests that “the basic law of Biomechanics is very simple: the whole body takes part in each of our movements” (Gladkov 96). Biomechanics is a style

⁶⁰ Music, and particular MacColl’s engagement with the folk music tradition, will be addressed more thoroughly in a Chapter Three.

of movement that markedly resembles physical exercise or energetic dance. It established a sense of rhythm upon the stage and, combining it with other methods of movement such as ballet, gymnastics, and eurhythmics, Meyerhold created a theatre in which the whole body of the actor was pre-eminent (Gordon, M, *Meyerhold's Biomechanics* 78). The actor is no longer purely a voice or a face; the audience's attention is directed towards the whole body in flux. This was the key foundation for MacColl's (in conjunction of course with Littlewood) own concept of movement theory. The theory originated in a variety of other scientific (William James' idea of reflexology) and industrial (Frederick Taylor's studies of the movement of unskilled workers) concepts.⁶¹ Through this method of movement, the audience could attend to the actor's skill and dexterity (Kleberg 75). This was not a theatre of repetitive slogan or crude Communist propaganda. Meyerhold, like MacColl, required talented actors who could entertain and astonish an audience.

The movements themselves presented a vision of the Revolution, a means of recapturing "man's primordial joie de vivre" (Symons 200), and were inherently political. According to James Roose-Evans "Meyerhold's theory was that the truth of human relationships and behaviour is best expressed not by words but by gestures, steps, attitudes and poses" (26). Movement became a direct political challenge because it is liberating; it indicates an equality within humanity and provides an emancipatory vision of the future. It connects art with the working process, as many of the biomechanical movements were also perceptible within the factory. For a Communist such as MacColl whose focus remains unequivocally on the means of production and the figure of man within it, this style of movement must have been attractive. Biomechanics upon a machine-like stage recognises "the fact that the factory is the real creative force in the world" (Lodder 2).

Meyerholdian parallels are evident throughout Theatre Workshop's productions. In his playtexts and in the exercise system he helped to devise with Littlewood, MacColl demands a similar ability from his actors as Meyerhold did. Indeed, he suggests that "we had a slogan between ourselves that we had to be at least as good at our job as the people we were playing to were good at theirs" (MacColl, *Grassroots* 62). His respect for his working-class audience necessarily engendered an aspiration for excellence on the stage. His actors had to exhibit ability in many areas of performance, and movement is an inherent part of his

⁶¹ For further information regarding James and Taylor and their influence upon Biomechanics see Mel Gordon's paper *Meyerhold's Biomechanics*.

general aesthetic. Littlewood described the Theatre Workshop training classes as “Eurhythmics and the beginnings of Biomechanics” though, as Robert Leach has noted, “very little was known of Meyerhold’s system of Biomechanics at that time” (Leach, *Theatre Workshop* 84). The company gradually learnt through their reading and classes. This influence can be seen throughout MacColl’s canon. For example, the mime scene in *Landscape with Chimneys* demonstrates the experiences of the factory worker, a figure inextricably associated with industrialised urban growth and, specifically, the northwest of England where “the landscapes of the central districts were dominated by factories and mills, which overshadowed the terraced streets of working-class housing” (Davies 11). The inhabitants of the street unite in order to perform this mime to the sound of machine noises. The Stage Manager draws attention to the exertion of the actors as factory workers by asking the audience to “note the play of light on the muscles” (28). Yet, he goes on, “there’s something disturbing about so much strength. Who are they? Does it matter?” (28). MacColl is seemingly suggesting that through the movement of the actors the audience can perceive a revolutionary possibility. The biomechanical movements become a political challenge in and of themselves.

Like Meyerhold, MacColl also accepts the centrality of the actor and the importance of the human figure on the stage. For the actor to be engaging for an audience, comfortable in performance and capable of effectively disseminating the political content of the text, he/she is required to move across the stage efficiently. Meyerhold suggests that if actors are physically uncomfortable or unable to execute simple, efficient movements, they are incapable of experiencing either the pleasure in the movement itself or the enjoyment of the acting experience (Gladkov 103).⁶² In addition, this discomfort places an impermeable barrier both between the actor and the fulfilment of his/her role, and between the action on stage and the audience in attendance. MacColl seemingly alludes to a similar predicament in the quotation referring to *Newsboy*; movement training became a “crippling need” for the company.

It has also been reasonably suggested that the company imbibed the ideas of Emile-Jacques Dalcroze on Eurhythmics during their search for a method of movement that could assist the presentation of their politically engaged theatre. Like Meyerhold, Dalcroze perceived a certain pleasure in effective movement. He refers

⁶² Meyerhold states here that it is “essential that the actor find pleasure for himself in executing a given movement or action pattern” (Gladkov 103).

to “this condition of joy [which] is brought about in us by the feeling of freedom and responsibility, by the clear perception of the creative power in us, by the balance of our natural powers, by the harmonious rhythm between intention and deed” (33). Using the body to its fullest potential, he felt, creates a sense of both joy and freedom. Both these elements remained important to the Theatre Workshop aesthetic. According to Nadine Holdsworth, “Littlewood developed on this principle [“an awareness of the human body as *the* original instrument”, a concept indebted to Dalcroze] to foster an understanding of rhythm and explored how the actor could control and manipulate different rhythms individually or in tandem with other actors” (56). She thereby, through sustained study of Dalcroze’s work, created a method of movement that both assisted the performance of the actor and created an innate sense of community.

The company’s final and most documented influence in this area was the work of Rudolf Laban. During the early 1940s Laban lived in the Manchester area as a refugee from Nazi Germany. He had developed his ideas of effective movement and dance over many years and had concluded that the aim of his art of movement was “to become aware of, to feel and enjoy the free-standing body relating to the surrounding space, and the feeling of changing qualities of time and dynamics” (Preston-Dunlop, *Laban* 101). Laban’s focus was the body and its interaction with both its environment and other individuals. He began to analyse general methods of movement, and discerned a marked contrast between effective and ineffective movement techniques. In order to describe these movements he created a collection of terms such as ‘flicking’, ‘pressing’, ‘gliding’ and ‘slashing’⁶³, and also established a codified system of movement notation that enabled him to construct dance sequences rather like composing a musical score⁶⁴; this system is referred to as Labanotation. While staying in Manchester Laban began to recognise that his theories could just as readily be applied to the theatrical, dramatic mode as they could to the pure dance performances undertaken by his companies⁶⁵. In 1943 the Manchester Dance Circle was established and Theatre Workshop joined its classes (Preston-Dunlop, *Laban* 229). Joan Littlewood had come into contact with modern movement techniques during her early training at RADA (Goorney and

⁶³ These terms in addition to many others can be found in Laban, Rudolf. *Modern Educational Dance*. Plymouth: Northcote House, 1988 (1948) 25.

⁶⁴ For detailed analysis of this system see Preston-Dunlop, Valerie. *Practical Kinetography Laban*. London: MacDonald and Evans, 1969.

⁶⁵ In 1943 Laban began to develop an interest in theatre and was invited to assist in a production at Highbury Little Theatre. This is cited in Preston-Dunlop, Valerie. *Rudolf Laban: an extraordinary life*. London: Dance Books, 1998 226.

MacColl xxxvii) and acknowledged the potential of such concepts for politically engaged theatre. With the addition of one of Laban's apprentices, Jean Newlove, to the Theatre Workshop company (Preston-Dunlop, *Laban* 223), the group enthusiastically incorporated Laban's theories into its work. Indeed, Laban and Lisa Ullman were witnesses at MacColl's marriage to Newlove in 1949 (National archives file KV/2/2175 19). MacColl's theatrical compositions became unmistakably influenced by Laban's techniques, while in response Laban appreciated the innovative approach of the Theatre Workshop company. In a letter to Joan Littlewood he declared that "I consider your group to be the only one in England which is, in the true sense of the word, experimenting in the use of all these factors which go to the creation of real theatrical art"(Goorney 161). There was a noticeable mutual respect, and the relationship between Laban and Theatre Workshop was beneficial to both parties.

In MacColl's plays there is a gradually more noticeable inclusion of dance and movement. Evidently, with the encouragement of Newlove, the company started to look even more closely at the place of gesture and the actors' movements in theatre, and the potential contribution of these elements to the communication process. These ideas were intensified by the association with Laban, who suggests that "an observer of a moving person is at once aware, not only of the paths and rhythms of movement, but also of the mood the paths in themselves carry, because the shapes of the movements through space are always more or less coloured by a feeling or an idea" (Laban, *Choreutics* 48). Laban posits a connection here between the gesture or movement and the thought processes in the mind of the individual. There is a marked connection between the exterior image on the stage presented by the actor and the interior workings of the mind; the physical represents the internal and they remain inextricably connected throughout Laban's work. Laban also asserted that "dance is an excellent medium for representing inner attitudes and conflicts. Dance movement leads beyond the usual estimation of the things of the immediate environment" (Laban, *Life* 177). Laban maintained therefore that movement techniques could indicate concerns in a manner that compelled the audience to consider them and meditate on them more fully. Therefore, visual gesture assists the transmission of MacColl's political ambitions, and enables the audience to fully comprehend the author's intentions and the 'personality' of the character.

In Laban's methods, MacColl discovered a means of resolving the fundamentally important problem of how the actor should move on a stage. Laban focuses exclusively on the pre-eminent individual just as MacColl discovered the centrality of the actor. Laban suggests that the individual can be trained to engage in effective methods of movement. He asserts that "the material of the art of movement is the physical properties of the movements of the human body, which we shape and mould like a potter his clay" (Laban, *Educational Dance* 114). His suggestion is that the individual, in possession of a material frame, can be instructed to use the physical faculties in an efficient, competent manner. Each individual actor within the Theatre Workshop company, according to Laban's theories, had the potential for effective movement and the tools with which to undertake these movements, but not the knowledge nor the understanding of the methods. He sought to encourage dancers, actors and the public in general to develop a new awareness of movement techniques. MacColl had the figure of the actor at the centre of his performative texts and Laban's methods enabled the protagonists to better comprehend the need to move effectively, thereby fulfilling their roles of presenting the political struggle more competently.

Laban's dance and movement techniques are inextricably linked with the idea that the body can be an aesthetically pleasing artistic tool. However, his art was not disconnected from the everyday. Indeed, this form of dance profoundly engages with the world in general outside the confines of the performance space. In an early production, *The Night*, he revealed a certain similarity with MacColl's later theatrical work. The dance focused on the greed and idolatry of the modern industrialised world and was, by Laban's own admission, unpopular with the audiences (Laban, *Life* 45). However, he refused to regard such criticism as failure and instead argued that he "must have succeeded in portraying our time, or else the audience would not have reacted with such indignation" (ibid.). This comment reveals Laban's profound interest in everyday issues and illustrates his view of art as an intrinsic part of the democratic process. Although his politics never dominated his work in the way that MacColl's did, Laban was acutely aware of the injustices of modern existence and the class struggle, as well as the depersonalising nature of the industrial system. He felt that "the whirring and clanking of thousands of wheels and chains is infectious: soon man himself will become a whirring of wheels and chains; soon he will see in life, in the whole of nature, and in himself nothing but the machine, and the soul will be forgotten" (Laban, *Life* 48). He perceives the detrimental nature of industrialisation within the capitalist system and

the destruction of the individual that this engenders. In contrast to the hierarchical class system that capitalism enforces upon the working class, Laban's movement techniques continuously suggest an equality in humanity in which all humans are potential dancers "not potential performers of steps, but potentially in touch with their own souls through the experience of gesture and moving" (Preston-Dunlop, *Laban* 64). Dance has a democratising effect that can enable every person, regardless of class, to regain autonomy and individuality. Indubitably, there are marked similarities here between Laban's project and MacColl's objectives in his theatre which, from an anticapitalist position, sought to provide representation and experience for a disenfranchised section of society.

However, Laban did not completely dismiss the workings of industry and indeed is seemingly fascinated by the intricate workings of the machine whilst at the same time fearful of its power, autonomy and subjugation of humanity. His arrival in Manchester coincided with his renewed interest in the functioning of industry. The connection of art and industry is, therefore, a phenomenon perceived by both Laban and Meyerhold. Edward Braun in his book alluding to the innovations of Meyerhold's stage insists that his theory of biomechanics is "the theatrical equivalent of industrial time and motion study"; citing an introductory lecture delivered by Meyerhold in 1922 in which he asserted that "in the future the actor must go even further in relating his technique to the industrial situation. For he will be working in a society where labour is no longer regarded as a curse but a joyful, vital necessity" (Braun 165). Both Meyerhold and Laban understood that movement-theories that could be applied to a theatrical situation could just as effectively be employed in industry and vice versa. Both regarded industrial work in its present form as a laborious and unpleasant task for the workers, yet perceived an opportunity to revolutionise both the artistic sphere and the modernised industrial world through the incorporation of movement techniques into these areas. For Laban, Manchester, as a city dominated by images of industrialisation, provided the perfect surroundings for his studies. He spent time by the Manchester Ship Canal and also visited Sykes and Harrison's foundry to discern the movement techniques naturally employed by the individuals at work there. The conclusions were later published in his 1947 book *Effort* (Preston-Dunlop, *Laban* 235). Laban discovered that the movement of workers as they fulfil their tasks profoundly affects the psychological health of the individual, arguing that "few people realise that their contentment in work and their happiness in life, as well as any personal or collective success, is conditioned by the perfect development and use of their individual

efforts” (Laban, *Effort* x). He intimates that the physical experience and the psychological experience are inextricably linked and that it is only when the workers fully realise their physical potential that they can achieve psychological contentment. It was an artistic method, like MacColl’s own experimental compositions, that was increasingly informed by Manchester, industry and the urban space; in it the art of dance was applied in a pragmatic manner to authentic everyday experience. In Laban’s work, as in Theatre Workshop’s, the ‘real’ and the artistic remain intrinsically interconnected.

Evidence of MacColl’s interest in Laban’s theories can be found throughout his theatrical output. The playwright includes frequent allusions to movement and dance in his plays in order to create differing effects. In *Landscape with Chimneys*, Jessie is initially involved in the factory mime but moves rapidly into a dreamlike state “where she is Cleopatra and Juliet and the star of a thousand Hollywood epics” (29). The transition from factory worker to Hollywood star is negotiated purely through dance as the stage direction indicates:

At the termination of the stage manager’s remarks her movements begin to change. The strong efforts give way to slow, light movements. She slips off here [sic] overall and is seen to be wearing a dance dress (29).

The change in movements arguably indicates the influence of Laban. MacColl also utilises movement to illustrate a scene through “dance mime”, as in the war sequence in *Johnny Noble* (61), or to contrast the characters of Death and Morning in the final scenes of *The Other Animals*: “Robert slips out of the cage and dances off with the Morning” (197), a visual symbol of his final emancipation. Admittedly this identification of Laban’s influence is potentially problematic as his ideas could probably only be directly observed in performance in the way the play texts would have been interpreted by Littlewood on the stage rather than in the manuscript copies available to us. Therefore the reader can assume that the dramatic text contains only minimal references to the movement of the actors, while the performative ‘text’, as created by Littlewood, MacColl and Jean Newlove, would include many more⁶⁶. Indeed Robert Leach suggests that Jean Newlove constructed her own interpretations of Laban’s work, developing techniques that were directly applicable and useful to the Theatre Workshop aesthetic. He suggests that in order

⁶⁶ Although Littlewood became the primary producer of Theatre Workshop’s plays, MacColl did make an active contribution to the development of the company’s ideas in this area: “from internal evidence, such as the references to rambling, it is likely that Ewan MacColl was also involved in the creation of these exercises” (Leach, *Theatre Workshop* 82).

to create a specific type of movement, Newlove invented the “dab-thrust” (“not as light as a dab nor as heavy as a thrust”) (126). Through experimentation the company expanded the ideas already present in Laban’s work. The playtexts rarely make reference to such innovation, conceived, as they were, in rehearsal and performance.

However, MacColl does helpfully allude to occasions where movement techniques are integral to the performance of a piece. For example in his *The Flying Doctor* which is an adaptation of Molière’s piece of the same title (*Le Médecin volant*)⁶⁷ specific movement techniques are employed primarily by the central character Sganarelle, a servant in the tradition of the *zanni* in *commedia dell’arte*. In Theatre Workshop’s production of this play Sganarelle was played by Howard Goorney, and later in correspondence with Goorney Jean Newlove recalls that “I remember quite clearly getting you to leap up with a flick” (Goorney 160). This is a term adapted directly from Laban’s work and reveals the influence that his system had on Theatre Workshop’s general aesthetic. MacColl’s play compels the actor playing the role of Sganarelle to be tremendously dextrous, and the movements he integrates into his play, including jumping out of windows, are extremely demanding. These movements were, of course, integral to the original Molière script, but in Theatre Workshop’s version, the nature of these movements is transformed by the addition of the Laban method. This agility of body directly reflects Sganarelle’s nimble and astute mind, which frequently enables him to manipulate and deceive the other characters. The mental and the physical aspects of the character directly echo one another. Indeed, MacColl’s witty script and the influence of Laban’s movement techniques combine to produce an exceedingly humorous play. However, the ability to move effectively also suggests the pre-eminence of the lower-class servant over the other characters particularly the father, Gorgibus and the lawyer. Both men would traditionally be regarded as indubitably socially superior to a servant, and yet it is Sganarelle who successfully enables the lovers to be together, manages to avoid the repercussions of his actions and even receives payment for his behaviour from both the ill-treated Gorgibus and his own master Valère. His notable superiority of movement, particularly in comparison with the rich yet elderly and infirm Gorgibus, is a distinct part of this reversal of the typical social hierarchy, and the audience begins to question the accepted assumptions about class and position. The distinctive difference in movement styles

⁶⁷ This play is discussed more fully in Chapter Three.

visually signifies the reordering of class positions and the possibility of lower class pre-eminence.

Theatre Workshop's preoccupation with Rudolf Laban's theories permeates many of their productions including *Uranium 235*, which, within its episodic structure makes sustained reference to his movement techniques. Jean Newlove recalls that "we wanted to show the splitting of an atom, not simply describe it in words" (Goorney 160), which reveals an important aspect of Theatre Workshop's work and of MacColl's plays; the literary text was not a completed composition but was adapted and interpreted in performance. The nuclear fission process is initially presented in the form of a dance in which a dancer depicting a neutron eventually penetrates a group of other 'neutrons' and 'protons'. This singular action creates the destruction of the atom, and "all [the other particles] leap away from her and land on their knees" (110). Although the term 'leap' could arguably be a generic term of general movement, the influence of Laban's terminology may well be in evidence here. The final leap is the concluding act of a closely choreographed dance sequence before which the dancers are described as "limbering up" in preparation. It is a self-conscious, stand-alone scene which effectively reflects a scientific problem in a visual manner. However, the Puppet Master concludes that this scene is in fact "too abstract, too...it lacks...zing!" (110). So MacColl receives a second opportunity to visually present the process of nuclear fission.

The second atomic explosion marks the conclusion of a dramatic and inventive episode in which the atom with its protons, neutrons and electrons is depicted within the genre of a 'Thirties' gangster film and all the chemical elements develop their own characters. The interaction of the molecules and the ever-increasing strength of Energy eventually produce a sudden, loud explosion reflecting the power and instability of the atom and the potentially hazardous possibilities of nuclear fission. The final blast is exemplified not only by an audible allusion to a nuclear explosion and a sudden blackout, but also by the movement of the actor depicting Energy, who leaps into the air to signify both its natural power and the dangers it poses to humanity (Goorney and MacColl 114). Newlove's aspiration to illustrate the nuclear explosion visually rather than just refer to it within the text is realised in this penultimate scene. MacColl directly incorporates a Labanesque movement in order to make a political and moral comment on a contemporary theme. It reveals the effective potential of Laban's techniques to a theatre company who consistently refer to their socio-political objectives. *Uranium*

235 is a play that incorporates a variety of styles and genres of dance into the performative text in order to combat the decision to drop nuclear bombs upon Japan in order to end the Second World War ⁶⁸ and to question the wisdom of developing nuclear fission at all. From the slow ritualistic motion of the alchemists (89) to the jerky movements of the scientists who discuss Mendeleyev's discoveries (98), MacColl consistently incorporates techniques associated with Laban. Indeed, the play's success in places as varied as Butlin's Holiday Camp in Filey (1946)⁶⁹ and the Edinburgh Festival (1951),⁷⁰ when it came to the attention of Michael Redgrave and Sam Wanamaker, was seemingly largely due to the speed, vitality and visual effervescence of the show. And the effect of Laban's movement techniques in the development of *Uranium 235* cannot be overestimated. These techniques and a close association with the choreographer enabled MacColl to develop an innovative method of movement that solved the company's "crippling need". MacColl recognised the necessity of expanding his theatrical aesthetic, and movement was a vital aspect of this development. In Laban's systems, MacColl discovered a methodology that both allowed actors to move freely and place themselves at the centre of the performance and also create a new vibrant relationship between the actor and the audience.

In the *Manifesto of Theatre Union*, the company declares that "in facing up to the problems of our time and by intensifying our efforts to get at the essence of reality, we are also attempting to solve our own theatrical problems both technical and ideological" (Goorney 25). In attempting to confront political issues, MacColl's theatre also seeks to construct a form that provides a 'living language', a new way to explore the urban space and the working class inherently associated with it. As we have seen, MacColl's plays indicate an eclectic range of influences, and he never disregards formal conventions purely due to their previous association with apolitical or bourgeois movements. Instead, he adopts those elements that best serve his political purposes in order to produce art that is both pedagogical and entertaining. In extending agitprop MacColl creates a flexible indigenous avant-garde that infused the conventions of continental European and American theatrical movements with a consistent sense of realism. The realism is not negated by the

⁶⁸ This momentous event provided the initial catalyst for this play. See Goorney, Howard and Ewan MacColl eds. *Agit-prop to Theatre Workshop*. Manchester UP, 1982 Iii.

⁶⁹ For details see Goorney, Howard. *The Theatre Workshop Story*. London: Eyre Methuen, 1981 52.

⁷⁰ For details see Goorney, Howard. *The Theatre Workshop Story*. London: Eyre Methuen, 1981 79.

inclusion of Expressionist, Constructivist or modern dance elements; rather they inform it. Indeed, MacColl's canon consistently concurs with Leon Trotsky's notion that "proletarian art should not be second-rate art" (Lang and Williams 68), but rather should display a poetic fervour and artistic originality. Through MacColl's work, Manchester became the site of an exciting, unparalleled political-engaged avant-garde.

CHAPTER THREE

“BEING PREPARED TO SALVAGE ALL THAT WAS BEST IN THE THEATRE OF THE PAST” PART ONE: THE ORAL TRADITION

People had taken it for granted that the only folk music we had was created out of the pastoral conditions, ignoring the fact that we had industries that went back to medieval times
(Woods, *Folk Review* June 1973 7).

i Orality, tradition and the past

MacColl's canon consistently reflects a search for a workable formal model adapting a wide range of techniques and traditions that can serve his social concerns. The opening chapters of this thesis have sought to discuss his plays in relation to aspects of twentieth-century experience such as economics, political radicalism and the predicament of the working class and the way in which such concerns could be reflected and elucidated through contemporary theatrical techniques. His theatre is perceptibly informed by the modern, both artistically (aesthetic form, stage construction, developments in the role of the actor) and thematically (war, material actuality, political principles). Yet in spite of his obvious preoccupation with contemporaneous artistic and political movements, his project differs markedly from that of many practitioners in the sphere of the historical avant-garde, for unlike the Dadaists or the Futurists, for instance, MacColl did not advocate the complete destruction of the past or a renunciation of long-standing artistic traditions.

Dadaist Tristan Tzara noted that “I appreciate an old work for its novelty. It is only contrast that links us to the past” (Kolocotroni et al. 276). The idea that the past can only be regarded through divergence rather than association was advocated with a destructive intensity by Futurists such as Marinetti, who asks “why should we look back, when what we want is to break down the mysterious doors of the Impossible?” (Kolocotroni et al. 251). These avant-garde movements reject the past as infertile and obsolete, as a limitation to modern creativity. The past is consistently implicated in the perceived failures of the Enlightenment, and much Modernism actively seeks an alternative method of comprehending contemporary society. Although not all avant-garde practitioners adopted this stance (for example, the Russian Constructivists utilised established folk tales, the Theatre of the Absurd sought to resurrect myth and ritual), a complete rejection of the past in favour of the new remained a prominent attitude.

But this, I suggest, is not MacColl's position. His relationship with the past, and specifically with the concept of tradition, is more fraught. As revealed in Chapter Two MacColl's plays imbibe the most effective methods of the European avant-garde and American Modernism; yet he intersperses them with a variety of more ancient, well-established forms. This hybrid form marks a conscious secession from the high naturalism and the techniques of the 'well-made play' readily associated with the nineteenth century but doesn't shun contact with earlier modes. As the title of this chapter suggests, MacColl's primary objective with regard to past theatrical conventions was the reclamation of those methods, movements and traditions that he deemed worthy of reappraisal and that could effectively assist in the promulgation of political ideas. The Theatre Workshop Company remained unashamedly open to an older theatrical tradition with the aim to "salvage all that was best in the theatre of the past" (MacColl, *Journeyman* 237). MacColl recognised the potential challenge that such a dialectic of old and new might pose. He reflects that "it was a paradoxical situation.⁷¹ We were intent on building a forward-looking theatre, but were being forced to look back consistently" (MacColl, *Journeyman* 237). This re-evaluation of established conventions can be divided into two: the oral tradition, the focus of this chapter, and the literary tradition, the primary concern of the subsequent chapter.

This dialogue between innovation and tradition can be perceived throughout MacColl's search for a workable popular form: something which also concerned Antonio Gramsci. Both men reflect on the necessity of popular culture that could mark a beneficial intervention in the lives of the working class. This popular culture, according to MacColl, could adapt traditions and movements from the past as a reaction against contemporary concepts of the 'popular'. In British Modernism the popular was a site of particular debate. The founder of the Vorticist movement, Wyndham Lewis writes in his 1914 *BLAST* that "popular art does not mean the art of the people, as it is usually supposed to. It means the art of the individuals" (Faulkner 43). This distinctly bourgeois attitude to art is constantly rejected by MacColl. However, his canon also reveals a reaction against typical working-class leisure and culture as he discerned it in twentieth-century Salford. Much of the working-class culture that MacColl rejects can be firmly placed in Gramsci's notion

⁷¹ Although MacColl refers to this reappraisal of traditional forms as a "paradoxical situation" he is, of course, not alone in creating a contemporary aesthetic from older theatrical methods. Playwrights, directors and dramaturges such as Meyerhold, Auden and Brecht amongst others adapted and incorporated dramatic traditions into their "forward-looking theatre".

of the private superstructural level (Gramsci: Rivkin and Ryan 277): that is those aspects of culture that rest on or engender “spontaneous consent” (ibid). The working class are unwittingly controlled by cultural events, pastimes or diverting activities. The Scientist in *Uranium 235* eventually cries out in frustration, “is no one interested in what goes on in the world?” (79), recognising the powerful hold twentieth-century working-class entertainment has over the populace. Gramsci advocates a “struggle for a new culture” (Gramsci, *Cultural Writings* 98): a new method of viewing reality, and one inextricably connected with the proletarian revolution. Like MacColl, he returns to long-standing forms stating that “folklore should...be studied as a ‘conception of the world and life’” (Gramsci, *Cultural Writings* 189). Accordingly, folk culture could reinvigorate working-class forms of leisure and entertainment, and MacColl recognises this “potential of folk culture as a source of replacement for an ailing and perverted national culture” (Boyes 41). MacColl is of course well-known for his activities in the later folk music revival but in this chapter I will maintain that his interest in and experimentation with folk forms began many years *before* his prominent work in this movement, and that his later work in folk music and particularly in the Radio Ballads, actually has its origins in his theatre. MacColl consistently strove to construct a working-class folk art, grounded in the contemporaneous experience of the proletariat. As the working class remains predominantly linked with the metropolis and its economics, MacColl’s popular tradition is part of an industrial folk movement with origins in the urban rather than the rural.

Due to his interaction with folk conventions, MacColl’s theatrical and aesthetic experiments could well be placed in an oral tradition. This is the “means by which a primarily or exclusively oral story, song, or saying is transmitted from one generation to this next” (Fox and Woolf 12). There is an evident difficulty in inserting MacColl’s work into such a category since his plays survive solely in script form as written words on a page; but there are seemingly two primary reasons for persisting with it.

For one thing, the young MacColl was surrounded by the oral. His early experience of performance and narrative construction centred on his parents’ methods of imparting traditional knowledge. He recalls that “my mother’s descriptions of her childhood were so vivid, so rich in delicious detail that her Scotland became more real in my mind than the place I was living in” (MacColl, *Journeyman* 13). His mother’s narrated tales created a sense of origin and place,

and acquainted MacColl with the profound power of oral storytelling. His father's songs were also a significant determining factor. While recollecting the songs sung at the bedside of one of his father's dying friends, MacColl asks "what, then, do these songs mean? What is the source of their power? I don't know, but I have learned that they possess some unique quality" (MacColl, *Journeyman* 84). Furthermore, much of his knowledge of performative style derived from his acquaintance with the Clarion Debating Society and the Young Communist League (MacColl, *Journeyman* 30-1): oral manifestations of political actuality. These early experiences, encountered in industrial Salford, provided the foundation for his later work in theatre and the folk-music revival. So one could argue that his aesthetic was primarily based on an oral tradition.

The second reason for associating MacColl's work with an oral tradition in spite of its existence in written form necessitates a brief glance at theories of orality, and specifically oral-formulaic theory as expounded by, amongst others, Walter Ong and James Miles Foley. These contend that the oral tradition, rather than being an antithesis to the written word, can coexist with and indeed impact upon it:

[Oral-formulaic theory's] central premise holds that such works, whether recorded from the mouths of informants or filtered through a textual medium, will exhibit recognizable patterning at the levels of phraseology (*formula*), narrative scene (*theme*), and the tale as a whole (*story-pattern*) (Foley xiii).

So the oral tradition may not be exclusively oral in transmission, but instead could contain a variety of 'texted' works that reflect certain characteristics readily associated with a traditional oral form. A script, song or story may be presented textually, as a tangible material construction, but if it contains the appropriate formula, theme and story-pattern, it can record, reflect or parallel the oral tradition. As we shall see, MacColl's plays contain many noticeable references to these conventions (the ballad, folk song, traditional folk plays, examples of localised speech and culture): the written text explains and reappraises an oral tradition.

In much of the theoretical material critiquing orality, 'oral' is juxtaposed with the term 'tradition': a vital term for MacColl, as he sought to interpolate his work into an illustrious genealogy of "Shakespeare, Marlowe, Webster, Sophocles, Aeschylus, Aristophanes, Calderon, Molière, Lope de Vega, Schiller and the rest"⁷² (Goorney 25). Tradition marks a "continuity with the past" (Hobsbawm and Ranger

⁷² This is a notably vague statement from MacColl. Some of the authors cited here will be discussed in the subsequent chapter on the literary tradition.

eds. 1), a construction of a distinct genealogy to which new material can be added if it contains certain generic connections or analogous artistic intentions. How did MacColl view the idea of tradition? Was his a concept of stability or innovation? The historian of folklore studies, Georgina Boyes elucidates an idea of tradition with which MacColl perhaps might have concurred when she suggests that “tradition is, by definition, a function not of origin but of continuance” (12). ‘Oral tradition’ is, therefore, in flux, consistently reappropriating itself and adding to its ever-growing collection of dramatic experiences, an ever-shifting assortment of plays, songs and performances. It is into these ideas of orality as a method and collection of distinct characteristics, and ‘tradition’ as a perpetually shifting sequence of works, that I wish to place MacColl’s canon.

MacColl’s association with folk culture has been widely documented in its later phases; he is acclaimed as a folk singer and was instrumental in the folk revival of the 1960s. However, his earlier interaction with folk forms remains largely unstudied and certainly warrants further investigation.

ii Regionality, dialect and linguistic experiment

MacColl’s primary objective was the narration of the specifics of British experience, particularly working-class British experience. One of the prominent aims of Marxist political thought was to break down of the binaries of nation states that alienated the working class of one nation from that of another and produce a class united internationally so that the workers would be able to concur with the actors at the end of agitprop play *Meerut* and exclaim, “Comrades, hands across the sea! Comrades, solidarity” (4). And certainly MacColl’s plays reflect the necessity of supporting the working class worldwide. Integrating images of the Spanish Civil War (*Johnny Noble*), the plight of the concentration camp victims (*The Travellers*) and the conflict in Vietnam (*Festival of Fools*) into his plays produces a canon of work infused with the idea of international commonality. However, his plays also reflect a profound sense of nationality. This is not a paradox but rather concurs with Raymond Williams’ conclusions regarding nationalism:

Internationalism, which refers to relations between **nation-states**, is not the opposite of **nationalism** in the context of a subordinate political group seeking its own distinct identity; it is only the opposite of selfish and competitive policies between existing political nations (Williams, *Keywords* 179).

Rather than national identity as the antithesis of international cooperation, MacColl reflects, as Williams does, that internationalism provides an alternative to national competition, specifically economic or political competition. National identity can remain an inherent and valued aspect of the individual's consciousness, producing a cultural nationalism rather than a separatist political nationalism.

Therefore MacColl's plays are often focused on the British experience and contain references to British governmental politics, the collapse of the British manufacturing industries and aspects of British culture such as the pub, the pools and the football league. Even when his plays confront international issues directly, he regularly, though not exclusively, grounds his critique in a British sensibility. For example, the Spanish Civil War in *Johnny Noble* is analysed through the perspective of Johnny and Taffy as "she [their ship] sailed for Barcelona through the fascist sea blockade" (49), and in *Landscape with Chimneys*, the war exists only in the localised consciousness of the street's predominantly British inhabitants.

MacColl's sense of Britain is not, however, homogenous in nature; rather he is consistently aware of the differing experiences, cultures and linguistic communication-styles of the regions. It's likely that this sense of regionality originates in MacColl's own experience of two particular regions: Scotland, specifically Stirlingshire and Perthshire, and urban Lancashire. Interestingly, he is generally antagonistic towards the south of Britain. He connects the industrial northwest of England and his roots in Scotland together, but his plays rarely contain any mention of working-class Londoners. Instead it seems he regards the south with a certain amount of disdain. After attending a conference in London in 1934, he writes, "what else can you expect from Londoners? No guts! Decadent lot! Not like us Northerners" (Goorney and MacColl xxxiv). To make things worse, "we felt that the London [theatre] groups were a bit out of touch with the problems that confronted us in the industrial north" (Samuel et al. 231). London and the south were seemingly dismissed as irrelevant to the early work of Theatre Workshop and in particular in MacColl's own work. This attitude may well have been relaxed slightly later, but MacColl's reaction to the company's move to London rather than Glasgow in 1952 (he felt that the company sold out and "vehemently opposed the move" (Leach, *Theatre Workshop* 102)) still, I suggest, reveals a continued northern bias against the south.

MacColl's connection with Scotland began with his parents. He asserts that they "spoke often of Scotland and their life there. They were exiles and still regarded themselves as visitors [to England] rather than settlers" (MacColl, *Journeyman* 21). The awareness of an origin outwith the immediate local surroundings provided his parents and later MacColl himself with a strong sense of regional belonging, a staunch allegiance to Scotland. Of equal yet entirely different bearing was his birthplace, Salford, where the "working-class culture drew enormous strength from the pervasiveness of the street networks and the vigour of the collective life" (Davies 172). Salford, as I've demonstrated already, was a place of community, a geographical space that remained an inherent if often derided aspect of MacColl's identity. This dual sense of national selfhood provided MacColl with a concept of regionality that remained a primary thematic concern throughout his work. With their strong individualised cultures and their populations' profound sense of regional loyalty, lowland Scotland and northwest industrial England correspondingly became two major emblems in his theatre.

However, MacColl does not confine his study of regionality to these two districts; indeed, his plays are infused with images of the Welsh, the Geordies and the Irish. How are these regional differentiations identified? His primary means of denoting regional identity is language: accent and dialect. Finding the ability to construct a definitively working-class mode of speech remained a primary and demanding concern for him:

I had attempted to evolve a dramatic utterance which would crystallise, or at least reflect a certain kind of working-class speech (MacColl, *Journeyman* 269).

Working-class spoken vernacular is not a homogenous discourse however, but varies depending on region, generation, vocation and gender. MacColl, therefore, in attempting to negotiate working-class experience from across Britain, incorporates a wide variety of speech patterns into his work. Evidently he is not the first playwright to construct his/her work through dialect and accent. In 1926/27 Scots playwright Joe Corrie wrote *In Time O' Strife*, a play written exclusively in the verbal discourse of the Scottish miners:

Ha'e we ay to be gropin' in the darkness? nae sunshine ava! (79).

Earlier Sean O'Casey had written *The Plough and the Stars* (1926) and other plays which focused on the experiences of the occupants of a Dublin tenement. The specificity of place is accentuated by the consistent employment of Irish dialect:

Are yous always goin' to be tearin' down th' little bit of respectability that a body's thryin' to build up? (147).

The use of dialect and regional speech patterns is equally evident in works such as D.H. Lawrence's miner plays, *A Collier's Friday Night* (1906-7) and *The Daughter-in-Law* (1912). Closer to MacColl's own time, Ena Lamont Stewart's 1947 play *Men Should Weep*, written entirely in Scots, is an arresting narrative, detailing the relationships in a Glasgow tenement and providing a perceptive insight into post-war urban Scottish life⁷³. MacColl is, therefore, continuing a tradition that received much attention in the theatre of the first half of the twentieth century. However, whereas these plays focus on one specific mode of speech (Scots or Irish or Nottinghamshire dialect) MacColl's work expands and extends these ideas by combining a variety of differing speech patterns in one play in order to present the diversity of working-class experience. This can be seen in a play such as *Johnny Noble*, which contains, in addition to the north-east coastal accent of Johnny and Mary, a Clydesider, a Durham miner, a Welshman called, predictably, Taffy, a Stoker from Salford and a Bolton-born soldier who is killed in war. Taffy's Welsh identity is revealed not just through accent, but also through the specific linguistic sign, "bach" (a Welsh term of endearment meaning 'little one') (48). *Landscape with Chimneys* is another play of regional accents, including that of Irishman Shaunnessey, whose experiences in the fight for Irish independence are alluded to during the new battle with the police who come to evict Hugh and Clare: "Here's me owld shillelagh that's fair dthry for want av a foight...Many's th'pint o' blood it's dthrawn in Wexford in th' owld days" (68). Even the Expressionist play *The Other Animals* contains an example of localised dialect. Guthrie, a dead weaver appears to explain past political agitation to Robert. He reveals that "the words were bleezin' suns/ That lichtit the blackest corners/ O'oor makeshift world" (181). A Scottish dialect even emerges in his most formally experimental play. The use of diverse dialects is equally evident in *Operation Olive Branch*, in which the traditional narrative of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* is articulated through the speech patterns of a 'Scottish peasant', Myrine, from Anagyra and the 'Irish' Crytillice from Corinth.

MacColl's friend, Hugh MacDiarmid (C.M. Grieve) champion of the vernacular and campaigner for an indigenous Scottish culture, concurs with the ideas behind MacColl's varied use of a myriad of regionally-determined linguistic

⁷³ *Men Should Weep* was later performed by 7:84 in conjunction with MacColl's *Johnny Noble* for their 1982 Clydebuilt season. For further information see the conclusion of the thesis.

styles when he declares in a letter of 1952 that, “as you probably know from my *Lucky Poet*, I am as much interested in the Irish, Welsh and Cornish as I am the Scots” (MacDiarmid, *New Selected Letters* 288). And this is one aspect of the close connection between the two men that lasted many years. Indeed, MacDiarmid and MacColl developed a strong relationship. MacDiarmid was a director of Theatre Workshop and attended the company’s meetings in both Manchester and London (MacDiarmid, *New Selected Letters* 269). He was greatly impressed both by the company which he referred to as “probably the best experimental theatre group in Western Europe” (MacDiarmid, *New Selected Letters* 289) and by MacColl himself who he affirms as “the brilliant young Scots dramatist of Theatre Workshop” (MacDiarmid, *New Selected Letters* 277). MacDiarmid wrote the introduction to *Uranium 235* in which he argues that “the vital methods of *Theatre Workshop* make the average production look like Victorian charades” (5). For his part, MacColl wrote an article for the *Daily Worker* in 1962 entitled ‘Hugh MacDiarmid-he shocked the pundits’ (Glen 185). Indeed, while writing *The Travellers* in the early 1950s, MacColl and MacDiarmid discussed the possibilities of co-authoring a play in Scots about Macbeth (MacColl, *Journeyman* 257). Furthermore, during the search for a permanent base for the Theatre Workshop company in the 1950s, MacColl consistently advocated a move to Scotland. He reasoned that:

Scotland was in the throes of a cultural renaissance; it was an exciting place to be and the poets, novelists, painters, composers and dramatists that we met greeted us with open arms. There was another, more personal reason: I wanted to write in Scots and for that I needed a Scots audience (MacColl, *Journeyman* 265).

It is plain that MacColl is referring here to MacDiarmid’s own proclamation of a Scottish Renaissance: a resurgence of artistic endeavour in the Scottish cultural scene. For MacColl, Scotland seemed the ideal location for a theatre company of experimentation and political vigour. When Hamish Henderson, another friend and campaigner for Scottish culture, concluded that “one of the most striking features of Scottish literary history has been the cross-fertilisation between ‘high art’ and the native demotic tradition” (Henderson 3), his words, consciously or not, capture the whole Theatre Workshop project: combining as it did all that is best in the theatre of the past and the theatre of the present to produce engaging working-class drama. MacColl’s proclamation to Henderson that “we are mad keen to settle in Scotland” (Letter of Feb 9 1950) was therefore based on his desire to establish Theatre Workshop in an artistically vibrant area with a substantial working-class population, and MacColl’s own aspiration to write in Scots. Theatre Workshop did experiment

with a base in Glasgow, the obvious choice for a group of actors who aimed to encourage a working-class audience. In 1952, while the company toured a schools production of *Henry IV*, MacColl and Theatre Workshop spent two months in Belmont St, Glasgow (MacKenney 21). Settling in East Kilbride (Letter of Feb 9 1950) or Glasgow remained a possibility during the early years of the 1950s, but the eventual move to the East End of London in 1953 ended these speculative plans. Theatre Workshop's decision to establish itself in the capital made it inevitable that MacColl should separate from the company.

MacColl proposed that plays should be written in a linguistic style that the audience could both comprehend and recognise as their own, creating a Gramscian popular form that engaged with the everyday experience of the working class. Dialect and accent represent tradition and origin; speech patterns such as the Doric, "unquestionably...[have] a past" (C.M. Grieve: McCulloch 27). Such verbal utterances create a sense of genealogy and continuity. There is little use, though, in a language that remains resolutely shackled to the past; vernacular must also discourse with the present. A primary reason for using such speech patterns lies in the necessity to expound the modern working-class experience. In order to do so, a specific language had to be formulated; Theatre Workshop had to discard verbal conventionalities of high naturalism and the 'well-made play' that contained "the language of the cocktail bar rather than the workshop" (Goorney 2). Indeed, while Theatre Workshop was producing *Landscape with Chimneys* in 1951, the Savoy Theatre in London was staging Noel Coward's 'light-comedy', *Relative Values*. This play narrates the intrigues of a collection of upper-class characters. The working class is represented by Alice, the maid who is consistently portrayed as foolish and uneducated. Moxie (a servant contented with her place in the social hierarchy) questions Crestwell's (a fellow servant who has social aspirations) treatment of her, saying "what's the sense of talking to the girl like that? She doesn't understand half you say" (Coward 6). The play is dominated by the "language of the cocktail bar". Theatre Workshop strove to disconnect from such examples of Received Pronunciation and construct plays through the language of characters such as Alice, providing a voice for those deemed too unintelligent to grasp the 'cultured' conversation of Coward's genteel upper class, providing a platform on which working-class dialect could thrive.

Joan Littlewood's response on arriving in Manchester was that "I loved the northern city at first sight. No Horse Guards, no South Kensington accents, no sir

or madam stuff" (Littlewood, *Joan's Book* 75). The company consistently reflected Littlewood's youthful reaction to the industrial North; their plays do not contain the manners, language or culture of the upper echelons of hierarchical Britain except for the purposes of satire, and the prominent accents remain resolutely working class. MacColl and Littlewood wanted to dramatise a specific working-class actuality and, in order to effectively create such a mode, authentic accent and dialect were employed. Hugh MacDiarmid addresses the difficulty of communicating with a working-class audience in his *Second Hymn to Lenin*:

Are my poems spoken in the factories and fields,

In the streets o' the toon?

Gin they're no', then I'm fallin' to dae

What I ocht to ha' dune (MacDiarmid, *Selected Poems* 152).

The three of them shared the same problem here: what sort of dialect should be employed in order to engage an audience? Will the utilisation of particular dialect alienate certain members of it? Will the audience feel intimidated and out of place in a theatre that retains Received Pronunciation? These questions preoccupied MacColl and MacDiarmid alike.

MacColl's use of the vernacular is also a political statement, a rebellion against bourgeois methods of enunciation. Use of dialect is a political declaration of intent, a reiteration of identity, whether class identity, national identity or regional identity. It is generally a mark of both distinctiveness and collectivity. Overhearing a conversation between the striking miners in *Hell is What You Make It*, Adamson declares that "I recognised you as my kind of people" (44). There is no suggestion that Adamson and MacKenna speak in the same dialect, but the miner associates the localised speech patterns he hears with the working class. Such examples of dialect denotes the heterogeneity of the working class as there are many different types of accent, but they also create unity; even if an accent is different from that of their local area, there is the suggestion that members of the working class will still ally themselves with others who speak in a proletariat regional accent. MacKenna and the miners' conversation is in sharp contrast to the affected and dishonest speech of the other boat occupants, who may have respectable accents, but whose dialogue and actions are dominated by selfishness, prostitution and the perpetual striving after power. If "politics, in its fullest sense, means the affairs of the people" (Goorney 11), then a play advocating a particular political stance, whether anti-war (*Operation Olive Branch*), pro-worker's rights (*Hell is What You Make It*) or promoting a final revolution in which the workers should "take the

world in your hands...and wipe it clean" (*Johnny Noble* 66), should be composed in a language that the audience can recognise and claim as their own.

iii The indigenous folk tradition: the Mummers' Play and the festival

The concept of constructing plays in British working-class dialects reflects MacColl's profound interest in the historical and contemporary experience of the people. In order to narrate this specific lower class existence effectively, his plays began to reflect ancient indigenous folk forms. For MacColl, the folk tradition remained both an "echo of the past" and a "vigorous voice of the present" (Dorson 16), a means of tapping into a creative movement that is both potentially anti-establishment and inherently proletarian. 'Folk tradition' is a broad term incorporating songs, plays, rituals, dances and tales. There is a variety of potential approaches when defining the folk tradition⁷⁴, but it is generally thought to be associated with "unauthorized"⁷⁵ artistic presentations, providing a sense of "communal identity" (Tillis 140) for people (generally regarded as from the lower echelons of the social hierarchy) and displaying certain "traditional traits" (Dundes ed. 3).

Although MacColl consistently imbibes continental European traditions into his work, he also adopts a variety of indigenous methods. Indeed, early in the development of Theatre Workshop, he recognised the marked similarities between ancient forms of British culture and the company's contemporary concepts of performance. He recalls that "almost without knowing it we stumbled upon a form which wasn't really so different from that of the old mumming plays—the *Seven Champions of Christendom*"⁷⁶ (MacColl, *Grassroots* 58). This suggests that his interest in the folk play sprang from a practical necessity; during early experimentation, the company found themselves, almost coincidentally, constructing their performances in a manner reminiscent of ancient folk forms.

⁷⁴ In his introduction to *Folklore and Folklife*, Richard Dorson cites twelve theoretical positions within folklore studies ranging from the ideological, which would appeal to MacColl, to the sexual symbolism of a psychoanalytical methodology, to the hemispheric approach, which separates folklore by geographical origin (Dorson ed. 7-45)

⁷⁵ As discussed later with reference to the festival and the carnivalesque, the notion of the folk tradition as 'unauthorized' is potentially problematic, as several traditional folk genres were sanctioned by the Church or by the aristocracy and some of them may even originate in these institutions. Traditional English Morris dancing is a case in point of possible aristocratic origin.

⁷⁶ *The Famous Historie of the Seaven Champions of Christendom* was originally a prose romance, written by Richard Johnson in 1596. In 1638 John Kirke dramatised this piece (Hutton 76).

In addition, his writings are noticeably governed by a search for an authentic popular form. In her essay on the 'popular', Morag Shiach cites some of the complex issues surrounding its definition. She asserts that during the seventeenth century the term 'popular' became "associated with a cluster of themes attributed to those of low social standing" (Guins and Cruz eds. 57) and this remains the primary characterisation of MacColl's own understanding of the term. His 'popular' is resolutely working class. Shiach continues her argument by describing the shift in the definition of 'popular' and the creation of myriad classifications. MacColl's own concept of the 'popular' does not go along with the modern categorisation that specifies that the popular is "of the general public" and "commonly liked or approved" (Guins and Cruz 61), but rather seems to accept an early meaning. In Dr Johnson's 1755 dictionary 'popular' is associated with "vulgar, plebeian" and "suitable to the common people" (ibid). Whether this definition contained an inherent notion of contempt or not, it is this focus on the needs, education and entertainment of the lower class that MacColl shares.

The question of the definition of the popular was a pertinent one during MacColl's theatrical career. The twentieth century was dominated by the advent of a new popular working-class culture that tended to replace many of the older traditions associated with the previous generation. Andrew Davies, discussing the culture of the Manchester-Salford urban conurbation during the first half of the twentieth century cites drinking, gambling and sport as the primary cultural pursuits of working class males (32). In addition, Hollywood films and jazz music also became popular. According to Davies, cinema, along with consulting spiritualists and fortune-tellers, was particularly relished by working-class women (79). The experiences of men and women were evidently different; "prior to marriage, young women enjoyed much greater freedom and financial independence" but marriage ended this autonomy (81). For both sexes however, the twentieth century witnessed a change in leisure and the emergence of a different popular culture. MacColl substantiates this idea throughout his work. *Uranium 235* begins with a collection of images of working-class cultural pursuits, from the jitterbug dancing of Frank and Jessie (76) to a discussion about the competing allurements of Hollywood stars (77), to the Sportsman's hope for a win at the races (79). The playwright is consistently aware of the common contemporary culture of the urban working class while always conscious of its limitations. As previously mentioned in relation to Brecht's conception of a pedagogical yet entertaining epic theatre, these aspects of

twentieth-century culture arguably silenced the working class rather than engender socio-political change. MacColl, by contrast, sought the creation of a new popular culture, which partly involved a return to a very old popular culture.

His interest in the folk tradition partly lay in its formal attributes. His preoccupation with avant-garde movements and his consistent reappropriation of techniques associated with the Russian Constructivists and the German Expressionists reveal the necessary search for a new form that could elucidate his political intentions. There are a number of marked formal connections between these early twentieth-century movements and the long-standing folk traditions of former epochs. Mikhail Bakhtin recognises the theatrical potential of such methods, stating that “in fact, carnival does not know footlights, in the sense that it doesn’t acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators” (7)⁷⁷ and one could apply this to folk drama in general. There is a profound connection between the avant-garde disposal of the fourth wall with its attention to the theatricality of the theatre and the metatheatricality of much of the folk tradition. The platform stage readily associated with the Constructivist movement was also present throughout the folk tradition, in which “space” rather than a stage was the only requirement (Helm, *English Mummers’ Play* 6); dramas are often introduced by the Presenter with a request for ‘space’ or ‘room’ (Leach, *World of the Folk Play* 11). Folk plays are predominantly categorised by declamation rather than modern conceptions of ‘acting’, and costume is denotational or even abstract rather than naturalistic⁷⁸. Perhaps most importantly, folk plays do “not attempt the detailed imitation of reality” (Bradby, James and Sharratt 153). The European avant-garde reacted against the perceived restrictions of high naturalism. The traditional folk movement, while having no such genre against which to counter, also presents a theatre of theatricality, of stock characters, interaction with the audience, song and a disregard for the naturalistic ‘sense of an ending’, even questioning death. This is particularly evident in the plays often associated with Easter, which are based around a resurrection in which a doctor is able to raise characters from the dead. True, the distinct disconnection of folk plays with notions of the ‘real’ could provide a difficulty. If MacColl’s primary objective was the “struggle for peace and progress” (Goorney 26), why employ a folk tradition like that of the Mummers’

⁷⁷ As far as I am aware, there is no evidence to suggest that MacColl was aware of Bakhtin’s work. *Rabelais and His World*, though begun in the 1930s, was first published in Russian in 1965 and in English in 1968 after the initial version of MacColl’s *Festival of Fools*.

⁷⁸ For an example of this type of costume see the pictures of Mummers’ groups in Helm’s *Five Mumming Plays for Schools*.

Play based primarily as it is on myth, exaggerated character and fantastical events? Could this undermine a participation in the political process beyond the confines of the theatre? Bakhtin eloquently answers this objection:

Beyond the images that may appear fantastic we find real events, living persons, and the author's own rich experience and sharp observation (437).

According to Bakhtin the connection between the oral tradition and the presentation of authentic life is evident. Indeed, this separation of theatrical experience from everyday experience, and this focus on the theatre as play, is the key feature of much twentieth-century politically engaged theatre; as Brecht argues "if the scene in the theatre follows the street scene in this respect then the theatre will stop pretending not to be theatre, just as the street-corner demonstration admits it is a demonstration (and does not pretend to be the actual event)" (Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre* 122). Declamation, narrator figures, direct conversing with the audience and the licence to extract oneself from the character one is playing are all part of the general disregard for the maintenance of illusion, connecting the ancient folk movements with twentieth-century theatrical innovations. After all, the folk culture has an innate political nature: being a "natural expression of man" (Dundes 10). MacColl and his compatriots were influenced by Béla Bartók's ideas. Bartók reflected that twentieth-century folk composers produced music for one another and, according to MacColl, declared that "if they wanted to find a way out of that dilemma, they had to learn to create in the way that the folk created" (Woods, *Folk Review* July 1973 4). Accordingly, the folk tradition had to become re-connected with the folk, the people and this remained a pre-eminent concern for MacColl. For Communist theatre aiming to make art "once more an integral part of the people" (*A Communist Policy for the Theatre* 15) becoming part of a long-standing genealogy of people's culture would have evident benefits.

However, it must be recognised here that folk culture has found its admirers at both ends of the political spectrum. For instance, the folk tradition's focus on the people, the land and the community could be utilised by extreme right-wing organisations, such as the Nazis, advocating a *Herrenvolk*, a master race (Dorson ed. 16). As Christa Kamenetsky asserts, "within the context of National Socialist ideology, folklore emerged as a field of central importance, and it seemed predestined by its very name to aid Hitler in building the new 'folk Reich'" (Dundes 194). And there are various instances in Britain of folklorists adopting National Socialist values. Rolf Gardiner was one: a folk dancer, rambler, pioneer ecologist and an instrumental figure in the discipline of folklore studies, he also concluded

that “national socialism would act as a vehicle of a peaceful renewal of culture” (Matthew and Harrison eds. 427-9). Like Expressionism, the folk tradition has been implicated in a political position that MacColl would unequivocally reject. But a valuable connection can also be made between the folk tradition and left-wing politics and, specifically to politics that challenge hegemonic hierarchical structures. Antonio Gramsci reflects that folklore could viably be regarded as “in opposition (...) to ‘official’ conceptions of the world” (Gramsci, *Cultural Writings* 189). So the folk tradition could actively subvert the conventional structures of interaction. Bakhtin develops this argument: carnival “marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions” (10). Folk culture could then be employed to both substantiate the status quo or to challenge it. The Nazis may well have appropriated traditional folk styles for their own purposes, but left-wing playwrights and theatre practitioners, Meyerhold, Dario Fo and MacColl amongst others, perceived the great potential of the folk tradition for the creation of antagonistic, confrontational theatre.

The Mummers’ Play became an important methodological structure for MacColl, culminating in the composition of his own Mummers’ Play in circa 1964 entitled *St George and the Dragon*⁷⁹, which tapped into this “traditional, unofficial culture of Britain” (Cass and Roud 12). Mummers’ Plays are defined by a distinct lack of theatrical paraphernalia (Cass and Roud 41) and a declamatory style of presentation, with the characters often wearing a disguise (Helm, *English Mummers’ Play*, 37). Like later genres such as the Living Newspaper and Brechtian epic theatre, folk drama of this sort consistently retained the possibility of interruption; dance or song could suddenly break the linear narrative composition (Banham ed 379). The performances are generally assembled in a tripartite structure; the play begins with the Presentation, a prologue asking for a welcome, introducing the characters or requesting a performance space. There follows the drama proper, and the play is concluded by the *quête* or collection (Cornford 61).

⁷⁹ MacColl was not the only British playwright experimenting with the Mummers’ Play during this period. Indeed there exists a letter written by W.H. Auden to Group Theatre’s Rupert Doone suggesting he might read Tiddy’s *The Mummers’ Play* (Auden, *Plays and Dramatic Writings* 490) and the company performed *Launcelot of Denmark* in 1933 (493) revealing a preoccupation with folk tales. The question of whether MacColl and Auden ever met remains resolutely unanswered. Auden translated Toller and Brecht (Banham 59) and won the Pulitzer Prize for his modern morality play in ‘baroque eclogue’ form, *The Age of Anxiety* in 1947. In this year and the two years preceding it MacColl was writing much of his best theatrical work, including *The Other Animals*, *Johnny Noble* and *Uranium* 235. It therefore seems inconceivable that the two would not have some contact, particularly given their respective connections with the BBC and Benjamin Britten (Auden, *Libretti and other dramatic writings* 740). However, this remains, unfortunately, the subject of speculation rather than fact.

Perhaps most importantly for a company such as Theatre Workshop which toured plays throughout Britain and took productions to the community, “the mummers *come to you*, not the other way round” (Cass and Roud 41). This is a theatre that rejects the necessity for one building as a stable base; its focus is on the audience’s natural environment rather than on the trappings of an auditorium and stage. There developed, therefore, a “close relationship between folk drama and its community” (Banham ed. 380), providing a prime example of the theatre of and for the people that MacColl would advocate in the mid twentieth century.

The Mummers’ tradition has been the subject of much speculation, interpretation and argument. There are contending schools of thought where the origins of the Mummers’ Play are concerned, but both can be useful in a study of MacColl’s play. This tradition has been associated by one school with ritual: “it is what remains of what was an urgent magic necessity to ensure life would go on” (Helm, *English Mummers’ Play* 6). This ritualistic element provides a connection with the past and shows a concern for rejuvenation; the world, it assures us, will be restored and renewed. For a modern playwright preoccupied with a future political transformation, this concept could appeal in its concern for change and development, a “revitalisation” (ibid). This hypothesis was questioned by another school of thought that maintained that the Mummers’ Plays have their origin in economic necessity:

Whilst it was not considered socially acceptable for respectable members of the working class to beg, it was acceptable for them to sing, dance or perform some short drama in exchange for a reward (Cass 1).

The notion of drama serving the poorest in society would most certainly also have attracted MacColl, and it connects the Mummers’ tradition to his own experience of travelling performers attempting to earn a wage during the unemployment of the 1930s. In his reminiscences of this time, he relates that “from morning till night there would be an almost continuous procession of street performers” (MacColl, *Journeyman* 53) and “their contribution to my theatre background was considerable” (Goorney and MacColl xv).

Folk tradition, as studied in the early and mid-twentieth century is generally associated with rural experience and with a past that was destroyed during the onslaught of industrialisation. It is imbued with nostalgia and a sentimental looking back to a pre-industrial, pre-urban society. However Mummers’ Plays marked a questioning of this notion. Folk plays were largely connected with certain

geographical areas, separate locales having its own separate indigenous tradition. The first records of Mummers' Plays in Lancashire seemingly suggest a connection with urban centres rather than the rural landscape (Cass 27). In his studies of the educational system, Gramsci cites the "beginning of new relations between intellectual and industrial work, not only in the school but in the whole of social life" (Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks* 33). Mumming in the northwest of England creates this dialectic between the intellect and industry, between cultural life in the broad artistic, literary, theatrical sense and the factories, slag heaps and docks of *Landscape with Chimneys*. MacColl's plays reflect Norman Buchan's claims for an "indigenous urban folk tradition" (Cowan ed. 159). Accordingly, the folk play could confront the contemporary urban space rather than a diminishing rural experience.

The primary mode of Mummers' Play in Lancashire was the Pace-egging Play, a "form of hero/combat play" (Cass, Preston and Smith 20)⁸⁰ that is associated with Easter and is "a key feature of an Easter begging custom" (Cass 2), identified with both a seasonal celebration and an economic necessity. MacColl's interest in the Pace-egging Play culminated in the writing of *St George and the Dragon*. It was written for *The Song-Carriers*, a series presented by MacColl on BBC radio in 1965. He entitles the play, a "Pace-egging play for Easter" (*St George and the Dragon*, title page). This suggests a continuation of a local urban tradition, but as the play progresses, the spectators can quickly discern an aspiration to modernize the form for the contemporary audience. Like the traditional Pace-egging Play there is an opening *quête* in which the actors "hope you'll prove kind with your eggs and strong beer" (1); food and drink are requested rather than money. In the traditional *St George and the Dragon*, there is often a confrontation between St George and another character, often referred to as Slasher; with Slasher killed, a doctor is called for who ably revives the young challenger (Helm, *Eight Mummers' Plays* 16-23)⁸¹. And this scenario is retained in this new version; the play enables a resurrection and is thereby connectable with the Easter period. But MacColl's *St George and the Dragon* is modernised for a new audience while retaining the quintessential aspects of the Pace-egging Play. George arrives on stage not in the obligatory "armour,

⁸⁰ The folk-play tradition contains a variety of generic types from the Pace-Egging Plays of Lancashire to the Sword-Dance performances to the Wooing Plays performed around the Midlands. I focus predominantly on the Pace-Egging Play as it is the form MacColl used to greatest effect. For further information regarding these forms see Cass, Preston and Smith. *The English Mumming Play: an Introductory Bibliography*.

⁸¹ These references to the traditional *St George and the Dragon* text are taken from a play collection by Helm from Alderley in Cheshire. For further study see E.M.W Pace Egger's *Play from North Lancashire* which contains a similar scenario.

sword and spear" (1) but "in jeans and bang-up modern gear" (2) and on a motorbike. Rather than a mythical knight, George is explicitly revealed as the audience's representative, a figure of association for the spectators. MacColl develops the Pace-Egging form further by introducing a selection of new characters. Firstly, Captain Slashell (there is, of course, a noticeable linguistic connection with St George's traditional contender, Slasher): a character who dismisses art for the noises of war:

No music like the crash of bombs or thunder of the tanks,

No poem like a sergeant's order given to the ranks (3).

He advocates war, "when I play games, I use intercontinental missiles for darts and atom-bombs for golf balls" (5), but is finally revealed as a coward who runs away when George challenges him. The Captain is joined by Golden Knight who demands money ("that ten percent would have given you the right/ To work by day and sleep by night/ On my land" (7)) and his lawyer, who charges George with a number of fabricated crimes. As usual a fight ensues in which all are killed. A linguistically dextrous Doctor is called and is able, with the help of a kiss from George's lover Molly Vaughan, to resurrect St George, and the play concludes.

Why does MacColl develop the Pace-Egging Play in such a manner? The new characters seemingly represent those in authority, the generals and the businessmen, who seek to exploit and suppress the working class. Golden Knight refers to George as "this hooligan, this brute,/ this vile, inhuman upstart" (7); he accuses him of threatening society's status quo and so challenging the hegemonic order. George, as Johnny in *Johnny Noble* and Adamson in *Hell is What You Make It*, acts as an emblem of the working class. He gradually realises that society can only be transformed through the active decision of the working class; after the lawyer proclaims that even "waking dreams are contrary to the law" (9), George declares "I take my weapon in my hand again,/ And fight for light and goodness and for men" (9). Like Hugh in *Landscape with Chimneys*, George is perturbed by the arrogance and injustice he witnesses, and decides to engage in combat in order to "rid the world of monsters" (9): not the dragons of the earlier Pace-Egging tradition but rather the repressive leaders of contemporary society. In the final scene of the play, Billy, the singer, declares that "now young Georgie's born again, once more alive and strong/ As long as he is with us then there's not much can go wrong,/ For he's the champion of our folk, the people's favourite son,/ We know each time he's born again, that spring-time has begun" (11). The play concludes, in a similar manner to *The Other Animals*, with the hope that the forces of the hegemony (in this

case aggressive army generals and greedy governments and businessmen) will be overcome, and the working class will rise from the political struggle to become leaders and “champions”. It is evidently a revolutionary play for the twentieth century grafted on to an established folk form.

MacColl’s interest in the urban folk traditions remained throughout his musical career, as can be exemplified by his collection of industrial folk songs, *The Shuttle and the Cage* (1954), which is concerned with industrial folk ballads. In this collection there is no music with a rural past or songs celebrating a bygone age of innocence and bemoaning its demise. These are “songs of toil, anthems of the industrial age” (Preface), which shows MacColl consciously interpolating his work into an established tradition of urban folk. This specific tradition is also there in his programmes produced for the BBC in 1951: “we’d choose half urban material and half country material, instead of all country material” (Woods, *Folk Review* June 1973 7). His interest in folk forms continues with his development of the festival model. This was, in a sense, a return to the origins of the theatrical mode:

In the beginning the theater was the dithyrambic song: free people singing in the open air (Boal 119).

This concept had a profound effect on many of MacColl’s later plays from *You’re Only Young Once* (1953) to *So Long at the Fair* (1957), finally culminating in the *Festival of Fools* (1960s, 70), which traversed the events of the year⁸². It is a form inextricably associated with the seasons and the progression of the months, and is structured in accordance with this. It offers great flexibility, actively engaging all participants and dispensing with the conventional passive audience. As Beverley J. Stoeltje reflects, “festival communication actively engages the participants” (Bauman ed. 262); the festival creates community. This aspect of the festival form is particularly evident in *You’re Only Young Once*, a self-proclaimed “folk tale with music” (title page), which concludes with the characters travelling to the folk festival in Warsaw (47)⁸³. Throughout the play, the festival has been a consistent presence and there remains the sense that this event symbolises friendship and unity. Festivals’ constructed communities can incorporate a wide range of individuals from every sphere of contemporary life, as is particularly evident in a play such as

⁸² MacColl was not the only artist to focus on the progression of the seasons through theatre. In 1946 Louis MacNeice wrote a “Salute to All Fools” for April Fool’s Day, in which “the March Hare decides to get married—to Truth—and going in search of her meets Journalist’s Truth, Poetic Truth, Tory Truth” (Stallworthy 346). MacColl was aware of MacNeice’s work as they were both associated with BBC radio (Woods, *Folk Review* July 1973 4).

⁸³ Indeed, the play was written for Theatre Workshop’s performances at the Warsaw Festival in 1953.

Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*, which includes pickpockets and other members of a criminal underclass, but also Justice Overdo and Dame Purecraft. Indeed, Jonson's plays, which certainly influence MacColl's own work, often explicitly reflect the carnival tradition; "Ben Jonson is the explosive creator of grand carnivals, giant belches, flowing lavatorial humour, strict classical learning, sublime lyrics, surreal rhetoric and mighty verse" (Woolland 43)⁸⁴. Jonson combines linguistic dexterity and enlightened scholarship with carnivalesque imagery; MacColl's plays reflect these two traditions in a similar manner.

Furthermore, the festival functions as an interruption in the flux of ordinary existence. It is a "temporary suspension of the entire official system" (Bakhtin 89), a momentary break in the advancement of time. This is specifically noticeable in *So Long at the Fair* in which the festival marks a means of entertainment for the soldiers on day's leave from an army detention centre. In conjunction with this, it also marks a temporary reversal of established hierarchies. Rather than retain determined social positions, authorities both ecclesiastical and political are usurped by an elected Grand Captain of Mischief, an Abbot of Unreason or a Lord of Misrule (MacColl, *Festival of Fools* 1965 2). The concept of reversal and interruption of convention is connoted by the labelling of these figures, taking the title of a recognisable dignitary ("Captain", "Abbot", and "Lord") and inverting it. This is applied to both secular and religious authority figures. Indeed, the conventions of the institutions they represent are also transformed into items for mockery and inversion. Richard Schechner would later assert that "often enough, the function of play as manifested in ritual clowning or large-scale blowouts like Carnival is to introduce flexibility into otherwise rigid social structures" (102)⁸⁵; it is in this spirit that the festival in MacColl's work becomes a space for innovation, rejuvenation and confrontation⁸⁶.

⁸⁴ Jonson's influence upon MacColl's aesthetic is discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.

⁸⁵ Bertolt Brecht also incorporated the image of the festival into his work, namely in *The Life of Galileo* in which the festival becomes an opportunity to critique the Catholic Church and its response to Galileo's teachings through song (92-95).

⁸⁶ Evidently, the festival form was not always subversive. It could be officially sanctioned by the church or governmental authorities in order to maintain the status quo. As Ronald Hutton notes, "at its inception it [Festival of Fools] was an exercise in Christian humility on the part of the higher clergy, whereby they handed over to the lowest the leadership in religious ceremonies at the time of the New Year feast" (99). The clergy, therefore, willingly renounced their authority for a brief period. Rather than rebelling against the establishment, the Festival of Fools "does not necessarily imply anti-Christian spirit, since the revellers were themselves of the ecclesiastical fraternity, so perhaps it was another example of the Church's parodic willingness to embrace, or at least tolerate, practices which had a decidedly non-Christian air"

In addition to this reversal of traditional hierarchies, the festival frequently contains subversive laughter. Bakhtin discusses the potential of laughter in *Rabelais and His World*, citing it as a method to discover truth and to overcome the sense of despondency that seemingly envelops the everyday:

Laughter must liberate the gay truth of the world from the veils of gloomy lies spun by the seriousness of fear, suffering, and violence (174).

As it is never used by authoritarian regimes (Bakhtin 90) due to its association with flippancy and frivolous entertainment and to the consistent potential for satire that ridicule engenders, laughter has an “indissoluble and essential relation to freedom” (88), and can therefore mark a challenge to hegemony. This is consistently evident in MacColl’s work, most specifically in his version of the festival form. The festival’s episodic structure allows for a variety of interrelated or entirely independent humorous scenes. One such incident is the marriage of Lord Hawke’s daughter, Lavinia in his 1965 version of *Festival of Fools*, in which the wedding is continuously interrupted by Lord Hawke who advocates a speeding up of the ceremony. This is achieved by an up-tempo wedding march, less fumbling with the ring and a dismissal of the traditional kiss. The comic episode is concluded by Lord Hawke reflecting that “well, we’re doing our bit to speed up the national tempo” (1965 50). The scene in which Lyndon B. Johnson and J. Edgar Hoover advocate certain changes to the repertoire of well-known folk tales also employs laughter as a subversive force for expounding what MacColl discerned as the truth behind the political system. ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ is transformed into ‘Little Blue Riding Hood’ while the wolf becomes either Russia or China. ‘Jack and the Beanstalk’ is regarded as subversive and cited as “Communist propaganda”, presumably due to the pre-eminence and eventual victory of a member of the lower class (1965 31).

Continuing the use of humour as an emblem of dissidence, the *Festival of Fools* plays contain frequent allusions to the economic state of Britain. For example, the labour experience of a working-class couple is included in the 1970 version. MacColl quotes an American psychologist (allegedly cited in the *Daily Mail*) who advocates a new way for the workers to consider their labour that will increase job satisfaction. MacColl recounts the husband’s return home after a day at work. He is extremely animated as he has been promoted to the springs section of his factory; his attitude is in sharp contrast to the mundane monotony of his job.

(Pegg 88). The people were, therefore, not necessarily creating a subversive mode to undermine authority; rather, they were participating in an officially licensed amusement.

The audience expects that the husband has some exciting news to tell his wife and the pathos of the situation is funny (1970 59). As Joel Schechter reflects, “to laugh with others is to create a new, freely chosen community, and side with those who see folly in illegitimate authority, excessive wealth, or their comic stand-ins” (219). The festival can mark a rupture in established beliefs and a search for truth. Both versions of *Festival of Fools* aim to uncover truth, whether in the portrayal of American troops repressing the people of Vietnam (1965 10) or in the exposure of judge’s wages that increase by 25% (1965 43).

The festival’s preoccupation with truth as MacColl sees it, the active questioning of established pre-suppositions, is equally evident in *So Long at the Fair*. The action is set in an army detention camp with the opening scenes presenting the experience of the soldiers. As experienced by the soldiers in *Operation Olive Branch* or *Landscape with Chimneys*, the army reduces an individual to a number and seeks to overpower his unique, independent spirit. As the Singer announces “the soldier’s blouse is neuter,/For it banishes the man/Creates a basic unit in his stead” (5). Turk is one of the central figures, a representative of the soldier who challenges the hegemonic army and is, therefore, incarcerated in an army detention centre. However, it is noticeable that it is not until they reach the fair for their day of leave that the truth of Turk’s desertion is uncovered:

I didn’t commit a crime! I haven’t knocked somebody on the head or
embezzled money or...All I did was stop being a soldier” (70)⁸⁷.

The festival denotes a momentary freedom to proclaim the truth, to re-examine and contest the “gloomy lies”.

iv “The rejection of an official established educational thing”: a turn to folk music

The perceptible influence of indigenous folk forms on MacColl’s work is equally evident in his use of music. His posthumous reputation has been based almost entirely on his participation in the folk music revival of the 1950s and ’60s. Appraisals of his role in this movement have been varied. Michael Brocken’s derogatory reading of MacColl’s work suggests that his music “perpetuated class

⁸⁷ This play contains a noticeable autobiographical link. MacColl was himself a deserter and, although his own writings contain a distinct lack of information regarding this period, Joan Littlewood’s autobiography describes the events in question (Littlewood, *Joan’s Book* 231).

stereotypes to a cloying degree” (39) and that he regarded the folk revival as a “packhorse to carry an ideological burden” (38). Hamish Henderson, by contrast, considered him to be a “master of sung ballad-Scots” (211). While he remains a figure of contention within the folk movement, I would argue that one of his greatest achievements is his use of music in his theatrical compositions, developing a genre of musical theatre. Combining music and theatre seemingly begins in his earliest dramatic presentations with the Red Megaphones and Workers’ Theatre Movement. He describes these productions as “seven or eight minutes of knockabout comedy, some simplified Marxist analyses, two songs and a mass declamation” (Goorney and MacColl xxi). Music continued to permeate his theatre from *Johnny Noble*’s traditional folk ballads (1945), to the confrontational *Which Side Are You On?* in *Landscape with Chimneys* (1951), to *Eelsfoot*, “a modern folkmusical” (title page) with Alan Lomax (1954) and the “folk tale with music” (title page), *You’re Only Young Once* (1953). Theatre and music finally unite in the most favourably reviewed of MacColl’s works, the Radio Ballads; but I would suggest that there remains a perceptible musical and theatrical genealogy from the early experiences with the Red Megaphones and his father’s songs through to the Ballads. The latter mark the pinnacle of a process that began in his theatre three decades before.

Arguably the most effective fusion of dramatic narrative and folk music is contained in one of MacColl’s best plays, *Johnny Noble*. This was premiered at the Girl’s High School in Kendal in August 1945 and played in a double bill with *The Flying Doctor* (Goorney 48); critics ranked it as “perhaps the most daring experimental show that the English stage had seen in a long while” (Orr and O’Rourke Part Four). Rather than refer to this play as a musical in any conventional sense, MacColl asserts that *Johnny Noble* is an “episodic play with singing” (35). This is an important distinction and provides a grounding for his musical and theatrical practice. Brecht concludes that epic theatre requires a specific sort of musical device. He advocates a “strict separation of music from all the other elements of entertainment offered” (Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre* 85); the sung episodes should not contain any notion of illusion and should provide an interruption in the story. The folk music of *Johnny Noble* functions in this manner. MacColl does not homogenise his music with the linear narrative, but rather marks it as a separate artistic genre, as a theatrical device. The characters are always aware that they are singing, it is ‘meta-singing’; and this indicates the pronounced difference between MacColl’s plays with music and the majority of musicals which

so dominated the West End. The First Narrator begins with the proclamation, “now come all you good people and listen to my song” (38). The Second Narrator continues this self-conscious musical performance with the assertion that “you shall soon know their tale of woe and all that came to pass” (ibid.). Music becomes “a muck-raker, an informer, a nark” (Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre* 86), a method of commenting on the narrative and of imparting truth. Just as they had been for MacColl as a youth in Salford, “the songs you sang were in a way on [sic] expression of the rejection of the official established educational thing and all the rest of it” (Woods, *Folk Review* May 1973 5).

The separation of dramatic dialogue and song is augmented by the introduction of narrators, numbered rather than named, who remain outwith the linear narrative and its community. The characters with specific names do not sing, the music is reserved for figures who can observe the scene and represent a commentator’s voice. The play contains two narrators who share the primary singing role. They are supplemented by a chorus of girls and a chorus of men. Rather like the chorus in the Greek tradition, the narrators, ‘girls’ and ‘men’ of *Johnny Noble* are somewhat detached from the action, and can therefore employ song to summarise narrative or comment on characters or scene.

The songs of *Johnny Noble* can be arranged into two categories: the traditional tunes and the new songs written specifically for the production⁸⁸, thereby suggesting both a connection with well-established traditions and the possibility for innovation. This dialectic provides an association with a “particular past...the culture of ordinary people” (MacKinnon 68) and the possibility of extending the genre:

Because the social basis of a community is continuously in flux, the folk music canon is always in the process of forming and responding creatively to new texts and changing contexts” (Bohlman 104).

MacColl also employed a specific long-standing musical genre in order to define *Johnny Noble*; he refers to the play as a “ballad-opera” (Goorney and MacColl I). This reveals MacColl’s connection with a specific British tradition. The prime and founding example of this theatrical method is John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera* (first performed in 1728) which contains a myriad of sung interruptions and was, of

⁸⁸ The music cues are published at the end of the play in *Agit-prop to Theatre Workshop*. Eight tunes are referred to explicitly as “traditional” while three are denoted as “by Ewan MacColl”. Five have no authorial denotation.

course, later adapted by Brecht in *The Threepenny Opera*⁸⁹. Gay's composition includes a variety of songs that remain at once independent of the spoken narrative and integral to it. The ballad song, according to Dave Buchan, is a "folksong that tells a story" (1). This definition is just a relevant for ballad forms of theatre and could therefore provide an ideal generic categorisation for a play such as *Johnny Noble*. He continues by asserting that "every ballad in this corpus has as its narrative base a relationship between two people; normally a third person threatens to disrupt this relationship" (83). This convention is arguably present to a certain degree in *Johnny Noble*. In Mary and Johnny, MacColl's play certainly has the central relationship. The identity of the third figure is perhaps a little less definite; Mary's Mother, who refuses to allow the relationship to continue while Johnny remains a seaman, could fill this role. The additional character could also be Eddie, Mary's dancing suitor. I conclude, however, that the obligatory "third person" is, in fact, the couple's circumstances that seem to conspire against them, from Johnny's initial job as a fisherman, to his prolonged search for work during the 1930s unemployment crisis, to his participation in the Spanish Civil War. Buchan reflects that "ballads tell stories that express a community's outlook on life" (171) and the scope of *Johnny Noble* which addresses a variety of aspects of working-class experience certainly reflects this.

Nearly two decades later MacColl revisited the ballad form with his groundbreaking and much-admired Radio Ballads⁹⁰. In *Alias MacAlias*, Hamish Henderson declares that "these marvellous radio-ballads, and the songs Ewan composed for them like 'Shoals of Herring' ... will forever keep his memory green" (211). MacColl's chief collaborator, Charles Parker, reflected that the Radio Ballads were a "breakthrough in popular art" (Topic Records 8). Indeed their popularity was confirmed by the BBC's commission of a new set by other writers and composers in 2006. The Radio Ballads seemingly created a new genre, a combination of song and recorded actuality. However, the origins of this innovation do not lie primarily in MacColl's musical career but in his theatrical work with Theatre Workshop. As Topic Records put it in a pamphlet discussing the Radio Ballads:

⁸⁹ In 1956 Sam Wanamaker directed a version of Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera* at the Aldwych theatre. MacColl played the Street Singer (*The Threepenny Opera: A Soho Musical*).

⁹⁰ This was not MacColl's first use of the radio medium. He had been a regular 'working class voice' at the BBC since 1933 (MacColl, *Journeyman* 229). BBC radio producer Archie Harding's "talent scouts had heard him [MacColl] busking outside the Manchester Paramount [and he] was hired for his proletarian authenticity" (Harker, *Was there another England?* 38).

It was MacColl's experience in popular theatre combined with MacColl and Seeger's conscious use of folk style lyrics, melodies and instrumentation that allowed Parker to experiment and break new ground (Topic Records 5).

How do the Radio Ballads relate to a play such as *Johnny Noble*? Like *Johnny Noble*, they are firmly grounded in musicality. The songs of a Radio Ballad such as *The Travelling People*, which narrates the experience of Britain's travelling community, act in a similar way to the songs in MacColl's 1945 play; they provide a means of explanation, of exploring certain integral thematic concerns, "music does not simply 'accompany' except in the form of comment" (Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre* 203). For example, *The Travelling People* contains a children's song which presents the inherent prejudice directed towards gypsies:

My mother said I never should
Play with the gypsies in the wood.
If I did she'd surely say,
'Naughty lad to disobey' (1).

MacColl utilises a recognisable playground song to poignant effect. The songs of this work are written in a distinctive folk-ballad style. They are "stories of doings and doers" (Buchan 83), narrating the actual lived experience of the travellers. The trio's (MacColl, Seeger and Parker's) use of recorded actuality was a revelatory innovation. The recorded material was retained in its original form "dispensing with a narrator and with dramatic scenes" (Topic Records 6) in favour of the natural, authentic voices of the people. This effect, I suggest, is not unique to the Radio Ballads, but can be readily discerned in MacColl's earlier theatrical aesthetic. In fact, actuality is a defining characteristic of much of MacColl's work from the agitprop of the Red Megaphones and the Living Newspaper form of *Last Edition*. MacColl refers to this latter production as "part documentary and part revue" (Goorney and MacColl xlvii), taking the narratives of the newspapers and affected local people directly from documented evidence and interpolating them into the dramatic narrative. Of particular note is the account of the Gresford Pit Disaster:

The cause of death in each case was poisoning by carbon-monoxide. They sealed the pit two days after the accident but the force of a new explosion came and threw the seals off again. Sandbags and girders were thrown high in the air. My husband was down that pit (26).

This quotation is an early use of factual narrative and personal opinion. The first three sentences relate factual evidence; the final line reveals a widow's experience. It is an effect later utilised in the Radio Ballads. David Watt suggests that Parker was highly influenced by the work of the American Federal Theatre Project "which

he must have known through MacColl" (51), and the Living Newspaper techniques are consistently discernible in this later work. Of particular note is *The Ballad of John Axon* which narrates both the history of the railway and the intricate workings of the train, and, specifically, the unfortunate death of Stockport railwayman, John Axon, who remained with his runaway train to save lives only to sacrifice himself in the process. The general and the particular are both narrated in order to formulate an accurate yet engaging account. The Radio Ballads also marked a continuation of the ideas of montage that so impacted MacColl's theatre. He reflects "in this we began to develop the montage ideas that Eisenstein had put forward—the use of superimposition and juxtaposition to create a rhythmic reflection of the audience; but in this case we were doing it in auditory terms instead of visual terms, with quick cutting and so on" (Woods, *Folk Review* July 1973 7). Many of his plays (*Uranium 235*, *Landscape with Chimneys*, *The Other Animals* and so on) are structured in this manner, and this formal method remained important in the Radio Ballads.

Finally, the Radio Ballads confirm the central concern of MacColl's long-standing aesthetic: producing art about and for the people. *Johnny Noble* is the story of a fisherman who experiences unemployment and a transition to political engagement; the Radio Ballads narrate the lives of travellers, teenagers, fishermen, roadbuilders, coalminers. In addition, just as the story of *Johnny Noble* is related through dialect and regional accent, the Radio Ballads also create a sense of authentic speech, "the unquestionable accents of everyday experience" (*Topic Records* 8). These characteristics of MacColl, Parker and Seeger's original Ballads are retained in the contemporary 2006 adaptations⁹¹. Focusing on themes such as fox hunting, people coping with HIV/AIDS and the conflict in Northern Ireland, the new Ballads employ recorded actuality and song in order to present the authentic experience of sections of the population. The Radio Ballads mark a sophisticated highpoint in MacColl's theatrical career. They were acclaimed by both critics and audience alike. Indeed, *Singing the Fishing* won the Prix d'Italia for radio documentary in 1960⁹².

v An international tradition: from *commedia dell'arte* to Meyerholdian aesthetics.

⁹¹ The new 2006 Radio Ballads can be accessed along with MacColl, Seeger and Parker's original ballads at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio2/radioballads/>.

⁹² This prize resides in the MacColl/Seeger archive at Ruskin College, Oxford.

With an obvious grounding in Scottish folk song and traditional narrative, MacColl's plays reflect an indigenous popular tradition. However, as with his consistent adaptation of Continental avant-garde forms, the overseas traditions also impact on his aesthetic. Perhaps the most noticeable Continental elements from a popular tradition in his work are those associated with *commedia dell'arte*. True, the tradition of *commedia* cannot be placed exclusively in the generic grouping 'folk tradition', as the plays were initially performed by a company of professional actors (Oreglia 1) and often dominated by a few families who preserved the traditions and stock characters through the generations.⁹³ Further, though the movement profoundly concerned the civil and religious authorities who recognised the satirical content and the challenge to respectability of *commedia*, it was also praised by kings and cardinals alike (Oreglia 129). However, *commedia* is a practice grounded in the oral tradition. The plays were not scripted in a conventional sense but "carried around in the heads of the actors and handed down from generation to generation" (Griffiths 16). *Commedia* is developed orally, "improvised upon the basis of an outline" (Wilkins 264), and although some scenarios were often preserved in written form, the general mode of conservation and presentation was based in the immediacy of verbal communication. This secession from the confines of a definitive script and the unusual means of cultural transmission reflect the indubitable link between *commedia* and the oral tradition concept.

Many of MacColl's plays, by his own admission, are influenced by or indeed based on his study of *commedia* and he mentions this tradition as a key aesthetic element of his work (Samuel et al. 242). Interestingly, books on *commedia*⁹⁴ stand alongside texts relating to Greek performance and Elizabethan and Jacobean theatrical developments in Theatre Union's study course initiated by MacColl and Littlewood in 1940 (Littlewood, *Joan's Book* 763-4), and during the war, books about Italian *commedia* were apparently sent to the front to Theatre Union members in the army (Orr and O'Rourke Part Four). The company's most

⁹³ This is not to say that there is no connection between *commedia dell'arte* and the folk traditions but the relation between them is markedly problematic:

The presence of popular theatrical entertainers in medieval and early modern society was ubiquitous, yet it is signally difficult to get any secure purchase on the nature and extent of their activities and the influence they undoubtedly exercised on the work of the later organized professional players (Richards and Richards 16).

⁹⁴ Unfortunately Littlewood's autobiography, which contains an extensive list of books relating to Greek theatre, does not specify which texts on *commedia dell'arte* were available to the company.

elaborate and sustained appropriation of *commedia* occurs in his adaptation of Molière's early *commedia*-inflected playscript *Le Médecin Volant*, *The Flying Doctor*. Written pre-1940 and performed alongside *Johnny Noble* during the company's residence in Kendal and on the 1945 tours (Goorney 48), *The Flying Doctor* contains a variety of traditional *commedia* techniques, characters and circumstances. MacColl's use of Molière's play as a foundation evidently creates a new aesthetic problem for us; can a play predominantly based upon a literary text, even if one heavily influenced by improvisational techniques, still be placed in an oral tradition? This question is inadvertently answered by MacColl himself. He actively distances his play from Molière despite obvious links in the title and circumstances, and reflects that although based on *Le Médecin Volant*, the play "is a very free adaptation owing more to the Marx Brothers⁹⁵ and the *Commedia dell'arte* than to Molière⁹⁶" (Goorney and MacColl I). The opening title page of the unpublished play states that, in addition to the obvious correlation with Molière's seventeenth-century play, this version could also claim origins in the *commedia dell'arte* play *Il Medico Volante*⁹⁷. This is, of course, not to negate the unmistakable impact of Molière's play on Theatre Workshop's new version. Character names remain unchanged and the general narrative is the same. MacColl even incorporates some specific dialogue from Molière's version into his own⁹⁸. Yet, the association of this play with the *commedia* tradition is marked; MacColl relates that "in the period between the demise of Theatre Union and the birth of Theatre Workshop, some of us had been studying the history of the *Commedia dell'arte*...and now [in producing *The Flying Doctor*] we were about to pay homage to them [the practitioners and originators of *commedia*]" (Goorney and MacColl I). The company evidently fostered an immense respect for their Italian predecessors.

⁹⁵ Robert Leach suggests that during the rehearsals for *The Flying Doctor* Chico Marx "visited the company to discuss technique" (Leach, *Theatre Workshop* 51).

⁹⁶ It is important to note here that Molière was himself influenced by *commedia dell'arte*. The French playwright came into contact with the Italian tradition during his extensive tours of France and his shared occupancy with the troupe of Tiborio Fiorelli, creator of *Scaramouche*. For further information regarding Molière's interest in *commedia dell'arte* see Richard Andrews' essay *Arte Dialogue structures in the Comedies of Molière in The Commedia dell'arte: from the Renaissance to Dario Fo* edited by Christopher Cairns.

⁹⁷ This *commedia dell'arte* link was something Littlewood recognised: she recollected that MacColl "brought out his version of *The Flying Doctor*... Molière with a touch of *Il Medico Volante* and some of his own jokes thrown in, Marx Brothers' style" (Littlewood. *Joan's Book* 158).

⁹⁸ A clear example of this is Sganarelle's explanation of his illiteracy. In Molière's original Sganarelle asks, "is there anybody here who knows how to write?" (35). In response to Gorgibus' incredulity Sganarelle declares "I have so many things to think of I forget half of them" (ibid). MacColl's Sganarelle uses the same logic when he discovers his inability to write a prescription, saying "why, of course. I'd forgotten. Really I have so much knowledge in my brain that I forget the half of it" (17).

The Flying Doctor contains a number of discernible *commedia* characteristics. Perhaps most noticeably, the play includes a variety of *commedia* stock characters⁹⁹. Just as in a traditional *commedia* performance, *The Flying Doctor* contains, in Valère and Lucille, a pair of lovers, the *inamorati*. In addition, MacColl incorporates a selection of *zanni*, lower class servants, from the garrulous nurse Marinette to Lisette, the young maid in Gorgibus's household. And, correspondingly, there are three *vecchi*¹⁰⁰, older men. The first is never seen though consistently referred to: Villebrequin, supposed to marry the young Lucille, is described by Marinette as a "resurrectified old mummy" (10). The second old man is Gorgibus, father of Lucille, and the final figure is the Lawyer. However, the central character is Sganarelle, Valère's servant. MacColl's Sganarelle is seemingly a concoction of various *commedia zanni*, supplying the quick-wit of Brighella (Oreglia 72) with the gesture and movement of Pulcinella (Oreglia 94)¹⁰¹. Sganarelle can also be compared to *commedia* actor Tiborio Fiorelli's creation Scaramouche. During the seventeenth century Fiorelli constructed this character as a "physical performer", an acrobat (Richards and Richards 229). Sganarelle's physical dexterity is a prime characteristic of his personality and, due to the well-attested influence of Fiorelli's performance on Molière (ibid), *Le Médecin Volant's* Sganarelle could certainly have his origins in Scaramouche. From his romantic liaisons with Angelique the tripe seller and the servant Lisette, to his ability to extract money from Gorgibus and Valère, Sganarelle orchestrates the entire plot. MacColl is here, therefore, tapping into a tradition of the resourceful servant, the lower-class character whose actions actually transform the narrative entirely. This character can be seen in *commedia dell'arte* and in the plays of Molière, but also in plays such as Beaumarchais' *The Marriage of Figaro* premiered in 1784. Servant Figaro's soliloquy presents a remarkable inversion of hierarchy and challenge to ideas of success, worth and talent:

Just because you're a great lord, you think you have a great mind! Nobility, fortune, rank, position— how proud they make you feel! And what have you done to deserve all these advantages? Contrived to get yourself born, and

⁹⁹ These character names are all taken directly from Molière's version of the play.

¹⁰⁰ The terms *zanni* and *vecchi* are traditional *commedia* terms and are explained more fully in books such as Allardyce Nicholl's *The World of Harlequin* (40).

¹⁰¹ Sganarelle is a named character within the *commedia dell'arte* tradition. He comes from the earlier character of Brighella and is a villain of no conscience (Schwartz 22). This later metamorphosed into Sganarelle. MacColl's Sganarelle is no villain and seemingly takes the most attractive and amusing of the *zanni* characteristics: the ability to move dextrously, the quick-wit, the comedic comments.

that's about it. As for the rest—you're really rather mediocre. Where I...ye gods! Buried among the nameless crowd, I've had to deploy more skill, more calculation, simply to survive, than it would take to govern the whole of Spain for a century (123).

So MacColl is further developing a character which has reappeared in various guises throughout theatre history, proletarianising a figure that pre-existed the Industrial Revolution.

This is the pre-eminent reason why MacColl employs the *commedia* tradition at all. He could argue that inherent in this performative genre is the radical destruction of conventional social hierarchy; so it was a theatre that could make a substantive contribution to politically engaged theatre as “the improvised comedy could be adapted to audiences of different social status” (Clayton 18). MacColl seemingly holds up the *zanni* Sganarelle and the respectable upper class characters such as Gorgibus¹⁰² and the Lawyer for comparison. In order to allow Lucille, Gorgibus' daughter, to enjoy the seclusion of the summerhouse and thereby meet Valère, a young man of wealth, Sganarelle dresses as a doctor and pronounces her in need of fresh air (17). This is an interesting inversion of traditional *commedia* stock characterisation. Customarily, the Doctor is an older man who becomes a cuckold (Oreglia 84). However, Sganarelle's appropriation of the Doctor role transforms him from a foolish figure of mockery into the conductor of the play. Sganarelle maintains the Doctor's traditional way of speaking. Allardyce Nicholl notes that the *dottore* merely talks (in sharp contrast to the energetic Pantalone) and that “sometimes the comic effect of his utterances comes from their inordinate length; sometimes...it derives from ridiculous errors” (56). Sganarelle, as the Doctor, utilises both these effects. However, rather than dismissing the Doctor as a pretentious ignoramus, MacColl's characters are, at least in the opening sequences, impressed and deceived by him. In response to Gorgibus's protestations that his daughter is sick, Sganarelle replies “Hm! Hippocrates and Calen [sic] both reason that a man who is not in good health is sick, and I think, on the whole, that I am inclined to agree with them” (13)¹⁰³. It is a nonsensical prognosis yet the other characters generally regard him as an intelligent and experienced doctor. He concludes that “the rest of my profession are in my opinion a set of ninny-hammers. I have made a point of unravelling many obscurities, Eureka, Eureka. ‘To be, or not to be’, as the noble Dane has said. Signor si, signor non. Per omnia saecula

¹⁰² These names are taken directly from Molière's play.

¹⁰³ This speech is taken directly from Molière's play (33).

saeculorum" (13). Sganarelle reveals his linguistic dexterity and his ability to maintain deception. Indeed, the conversation between Sganarelle, as the Doctor, and the Lawyer is littered with Latin phrases and unintelligible statements, as it is in Molière's version, yet the Lawyer, a supposed man of learning, leaves the house believing that 'Dr. Palaprat' is a worthy medical man (20); Molière's Lawyer reflects that he is "more impressed than before with your percipience and breadth of knowledge" (37) and MacColl's Lawyer blindly concludes likewise. *Commedia's* targets in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are the merchant (Pantalone), the professional (*dottore*, lawyer) or the soldier (Captains with bombastic names); these are the sources of jokes that could be shared by all classes whether lower or aristocratic. With the rise of the bourgeoisie in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, these figures merge into a political class that can be attacked from an ideological position. It is into this tradition that MacColl taps.

The Flying Doctor is a textual embodiment of MacColl's political project to disturb the traditional social hierarchy and revolutionise class boundaries, to "recoil from our society's dominant respectable values" (Green and Swan xv). Indeed, the action is diverted away from the lovers or the generational relationships, traditional thematic concerns of *commedia* and instead MacColl creates a play that challenges typical conceptions of taste and respectability. Bakhtin reflects that "the essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level" (19) and MacColl's version of Molière's play substantiates this. The opening scene includes a tripe seller who bemoans the effect of tripe on her romantic attachments:

The tripe has entered my soul, it has ravished my reason, destroyed my peace.

Oh, base tripe that came between our love (1).¹⁰⁴

In combining her experience of love with the emblem of cow's stomachs¹⁰⁵, MacColl succeeds in developing a tangible sense of material baseness. In addition, the action is defined by the economic. Sganarelle's acceptance of wages from Valère coincides with his admission that "for twelve pistoles I wouldn't like to swear that I wasn't a doctor" (8). In appropriating money from Valère under the pretence of getting married, his master expresses surprise that Sganarelle has

¹⁰⁴ Sganarelle's love interests are additions to Molière's original play. MacColl incorporates a new opening scene in which Sganarelle is portrayed as a man with many female admirers. He manipulates the situation so he is able to receive the affection of both. MacColl is, therefore, creating a rival image of promiscuity to the devotion of Valère to Lucile.

¹⁰⁵ Indeed Bakhtin mentions that the image of tripe is a recurring emblem in carnival, presumably because it is distasteful and grotesque. (Bakhtin 221).

adopted a role as husband. Sganarelle responds, "I'm not [married], Monsieur. But I would have been if I hadn't given her the twelve pistoles" (21). Love is reduced to financial gain and deception. Indeed, love for Sganarelle resembles a series of sexual conquests, and the play is scattered with innuendo and allusions to promiscuity; "all that is sacred and exalted is rethought on the level of the material bodily stratum" (Bakhtin 370). This inversion of traditional codes is prevalent in early *commedia dell'arte*, if only, like the medieval Feast of Fools, for the duration of the performance, and is expanded upon and given greater weight in MacColl's own rendering of *The Flying Doctor*.

The *commedia* tradition's aesthetic conventions also had certain appeal for MacColl. Like the later contemporary European theatrical developments MacColl admired, *commedia* is defined by metatheatricality and non-illusionistic techniques; indeed the *commedia* production "mirrors a dream rather than reality" (140), delineated by masked stock characters and fantasy rather than highly-developed naturalistic characterisation and illusionistic realism. *Commedia* developed "the notion of theatre as 'play'" (Pietropaolo 203), as a game rather than a pretence of actual material existence. In this *commedia* marked a challenge to the concurrent theatre of, for example, Shakespeare's Globe which, though metatheatrical, still contains a focus on aspects of 'reality' with its frequent emphasis of historical events, empathetic figures and recognisable situations.¹⁰⁶ MacColl develops the idea of the dream in *The Flying Doctor*, beginning his play with a "danced prologue":

As the prologue proceeds each character presents itself, with characteristic mime, to the audience and finally the entire cast, moving downstage, make a grand curtsy (introductory notes).

Accordingly, characters do not have the intricacies or complexities of naturalistic personalities, but discernible and stable stock identities. In addition, the actors are able, from the fore, to acknowledge the presence of an audience thereby disturbing the theatrical fourth wall.

As previously mentioned in relation to dance techniques and Laban, *The Flying Doctor* contains specific methods of movement. In an attempt to retain his

¹⁰⁶ Evidently, many of Shakespeare's plays do also have dream elements: the magic of *Midsummer Night's Dream* or *Tempest*. However, Shakespeare's plays are also largely associated with historical events, the monarchy and topics relevant to contemporary society, such as financial dealings and the clash of ideologies in a play like *Merchant of Venice*.

identity as both wayward brother and well-respected doctor, Sganarelle proceeds to continuously jump in and out of windows. This physical comedy owed much to the company's work with Laban (Goorney 160), yet originated in *commedia*'s own acting style, "the special ability of its actors to display their agility with words and gymnastics" (Griffiths 2). Sganarelle reflects dexterity both physically and linguistically. Aesthetically then, MacColl discovered, in *commedia*, a theatrical style that could address an audience and disrupt illusion.

The connection between *commedia* and the twentieth-century stage, and specifically the politically engaged theatrical movements, is consistently discernible. However, as with Expressionism, *commedia* had less impact on the British stage than on the Continental European (Fisher 104). It's true that Gordon Craig certainly admired the *commedia* form and elements of *commedia* can be perceived in the plays of Shaw, Barrie and the theatrical projects of Granville Barker (Fisher 88, 91, 92). Undoubtedly, *commedia* had a certain influence on the development of that quintessentially British theatrical form, the pantomime (Fisher 75), a form to which this thesis will return. Yet it was in other mainland European countries that the connection between *commedia*, the avant-garde and artistically-mediated political challenge was much more widespread. J. Douglas Clayton reflects on the influence of *commedia* in Russian theatre, citing Meyerhold's productions as particular examples. He describes the Russian's use of the mask (20), the *lazzi* (24) and the "interplay of the serious and the farcical or parodistic" (ibid). Robert Leach cites further *commedia* elements in Meyerhold's *Magnanimous Cuckold* (Leach, *Revolutionary Theatre* 111) and argues that it was the "ability to combine echoes of popular tradition with something distinctly and consciously contemporary" (ibid) that marked *Magnanimous Cuckold* as an effective piece of drama. Meyerhold discerned the possibilities in the *commedia* tradition to produce theatre that entertained through physical comedy and satirical caricatures while subverting the pre-determined socio-political hierarchies of pre-Revolutionary Russia. Again, Vakhtangov, a theatrical figure who MacColl regarded as closest to Theatre Workshop's own aesthetic¹⁰⁷, also valued the *commedia* tradition, believing its essence to be its innate "lack of restraint" (Fisher 139). But the connection of left-wing political values and *commedia* is not restricted to the Russian

¹⁰⁷ See Chapter Two of this thesis for further information regarding the similarities between Theatre Workshop's work and Vakhtangov's.

Constructivists; it can be found later in Italy at its most mature and advanced in the work of Dario Fo¹⁰⁸, which is worth setting alongside MacColl's.

Fo cites the subversive history of *commedia*, reflecting on the Italian companies' expulsion from France in (he thinks) 1675¹⁰⁹. He concludes that "it was their satire on the customs, the hypocrisy and the politicking of the age which was considered remiss" (Fo, *Tricks of the Trade* 47). Like MacColl, Fo looks backwards to a former age of oral tradition and popular theatre in order to construct an innovative formal method that could pose a challenge in the contemporary, even combining *commedia* techniques with other yet earlier Italian conventions, citing the influence of the *giullari*, the travelling player (Behan 96), and *Grammelot*, the invented language used by medieval strolling players (Mitchell 9).¹¹⁰

In his critical, satirical stance and his utilisation of traditional modes of characterisation and story-telling, Fo's project resembles that of MacColl and Theatre Workshop. There are marked similarities, for example, between Fo's *The Accidental Death of An Anarchist* and MacColl's *The Flying Doctor*. The protagonist in both (the Maniac in the former and Sganarelle in the latter) is a seemingly lower-class figure whom those in authority dismiss as a fool (MacColl 8; Fo 6.). In reality this figure is physically adroit, linguistically humorous and sharp, and orchestrates the entire narrative. MacColl and Fo both employ the *commedia* notion of disguise in order to add further complexities to the central character. Mel Gordon asserts that often in the *commedia* tradition "the humour grows out of a class reversal, the servant acts like a master and the master becomes confused" (Gordon, *Lazzi* 37). This is a prominent feature of MacColl's play. It is also employed by Fo's Maniac who disguises himself as Lord Justice Malcolm (18), a forensic scientist (57) and a bishop (78), and promptly creates turmoil and disorder within the police department. It is interesting to note that, like MacColl, Fo inverts traditional *commedia* stock characters (the lawyer, the doctor), and indeed, like the participants in the Festival of Fools, the Catholic leaders, in order to create his

¹⁰⁸ Evidently Meyerhold pre-dates the later Fo. There is no evidence to suggest that MacColl and Fo ever met, though they both employed long-standing theatrical forms to further left-wing political projects.

¹⁰⁹ This is Fo's own date but most other sources would agree that the expulsion of the Italian troupe from France occurred in 1697 (Cairns ed. 178, George and Gossip eds. 104).

¹¹⁰ Arguably, Fo's theatre is more influenced by earlier Italian traditions than *commedia*. Behan cites the difference between the *giullari* who performed to ordinary people from the towns and countryside, and *commedia*, which was often performed to the major courts of the nobles (95). *Commedia* remains highly influential in Fo's work; his wife Franca Rame comes from a long tradition of *commedia* actors and taught Fo many of the *lazzi* and improvisational skills.

political comment; both Sganarelle and the Maniac adopt the guises of these stock characters in order to present them through mockery and ridicule. Establishment figures become objects of derision, reflecting the *commedia* tradition which, “polemical or subversive in intent” (Clayton 134) inverts conventional social hierarchy and challenges the assumptions of the status quo. Rather than overtly political, the *commedia* tradition contains elements of latent subversion, the consistent potential to undermine bourgeois taste and respectability. This connection between eloquent speech, physical dexterity and political subversion remains, as it does in MacColl’s plays, a consistent characteristic of Fo’s work. The ‘Birth of the Jongleur’ in *Mistero Buffo* contains a central protagonist who asserts “I am the jongleur. I leap and pirouette, and make you laugh. I make fun of those in power” (48). Like Sganarelle in *The Flying Doctor*, the Jongleur (*Mistero Buffo*) and the Maniac (*Accidental Death*) provide both humour and dissident comment. Fo reflects that “any theatre, literature or artistic expression which doesn’t speak about its own time is non-existent” (Behan 138). Like MacColl, in order to negotiate his “own time”, Fo looks to the traditions of the past and creates a dialectic between former theatrical methods of expression and contemporary actuality. There are important distinctions between the two; firstly, MacColl is British and this marks him as somewhat unique in a national theatrical tradition that has largely ignored foreign folk movements. Furthermore, MacColl preceded the much-celebrated Fo; he was experimenting with ancient Italian tradition and its potential for left-wing political theatre many decades before Fo.

MacColl’s exploration of popular theatrical form led him to investigate indigenous British methods which, to an extent, had their origins in *commedia dell’arte*. Although, as previously mentioned, *commedia* had a somewhat limited impact on dramatic form in Britain, elements do exist in a range of British performance traditions. One such artistic genre is ‘Punch and Judy: another is the ‘Pierrot’ show and a third, pantomime. Indeed, “it was in English pantomime that some of the essential elements of *Commedia dell’Arte* survived longer than anywhere else” (Mander and Mitchenson 3). The pantomime, at least up until the early twentieth century, provided an image of *commedia* in a metamorphosed state, retaining figures such as Harlequin and continuing to explore the use of mask while performing traditional fairytales familiar to a British audience in a genre defined in

part by noise, boisterous action and linguistic farce.¹¹¹ MacColl's allusions to the pantomime form reside largely in his use of comedy of this sort. In his nuclear fission play, *Uranium 235*, he constructs a dialogue between Albert Einstein, the Secretary, the Puppet Master, Max Planck and Nils Bohr. MacColl suggests that it is "knockabout comedy" (107), and the linguistic interaction resembles that of the farcical parts of pantomime:

Puppet Master: How do you do?

Planck: How do we do what?

Einstein: This 'how do you do', it is idiomatic, no?

Puppet Master: Yes. Do you think you could explain to your friends that I am a very busy man? (108)

Pantomime traditionally combines a variety of artistic conventions in one performance: cross-talk of this sort, music, acrobatics, mime, dance. *Uranium 235* too is a play of dance, mime and linguistic exuberance, a "clash of different idioms" (MacColl and Goorney iv). Indeed, MacColl referred to it as a "Variety show" (Goorney 52), an episodic pageant reminiscent of the Music Hall. Conventionally "the pub, the music hall and cinema have all been viewed as providing opportunities to escape from everyday problems" (169); but MacColl, by contrast, grasped the potential of taking recognisably working-class entertainments and transforming them into an artistic genre that could encourage audience engagement. Pantomime, music hall, variety shows, puppetry, street entertainment and folk art myths may all be called on. Indeed, one of the company's earliest productions, the Living Newspaper *Last Edition*, explicitly amalgamated "fantasy, satire, agit-prop, music hall, folk song and dance" (Goorney 22).

The variety show was later employed by Theatre Workshop in their production *Oh What A Lovely War* (1963), which, though dismissed by MacColl who considered it to be "'the nadir' of Theatre Workshop, its entertainment imperative warming the hearts of friend and foe alike" (Paget, *Oh What a Lovely War* 258), represented a high point in the company's use of music hall images; the Pierrot show, the music, the exuberant sequinned lady all reflect this tradition. In spite of MacColl's dismissal of such productions as containing the "rosy glow of nostalgia" (Goorney 128), he himself certainly emulated the flexibility and spectacle of the variety show:

¹¹¹ The photographs in Mander and Mitchenson's *Pantomime* provide a useful record of the juxtaposition of these elements.

It was the variety theatre which really made the most profound impression on me; the live music, the wandering limelights, the incredibly beautiful chorus girls, the grotesquely made-up comics and the dashing acrobats— these were indeed the stuff that dreams are made on!” (Goorney and MacColl xv).

The theatrical elements that made such an impact on the young MacColl are evident many years later in plays such as *Uranium 235*. This play received a tremendous reaction from the predominantly working-class audience who saw it. Joan Littlewood recalls, “the large audience gave us the same treatment as they gave everybody else, whistling, shouting comments and clapping each scene in *Uranium 235* as if it had been a music-hall turn” (Littlewood, *Joan’s Book* 200). In the utilisation of recognisable popular forms Theatre Workshop created a play that combined all the vibrancy and vitality of the music hall with the militant political activism they consistently displayed.

Equally evident is the tradition of puppetry. *Uranium 235* contains a sinister character named the Puppet Master. Archival resources relating to this production reveal a large projected image of MacColl as Puppet Master controlling strings attached to a collection of characters.



Working Class Movement Library
www.wcml.org.uk

This provides the audience with the image of authoritarian power that controls the population’s actions and consciousnesses. The people remain entirely dependent on the Puppet Master, since, as Frank Proschan asserts, “puppets, of course, cannot speak for themselves” (528). As the Puppet Master insists “Don’t worry about the audience...I’m planning a big show for them” (100). The figure of the Puppet

Master throughout twentieth-century theatre mediates the action for the audience, dictating what it sees and how it sees it; the Puppet Master “literally breathes life into his creation” (Taxidou, *The Mask* 87). Interestingly, this image of puppetry is a continental one, since it involves puppets on strings rather than the British tradition of the glove puppet. The marionette had become an emblem of Modernist aesthetics, particularly through the work of Edward Gordon Craig. The puppet was the “perfect artifice, the perfect expression of the almighty *aesthetic will*” (Taxidou, *The Mask* 142). The position of the human actor, a protagonist of fallibility and frailties could be usurped by an ‘actor’ that could be entirely controlled by the Puppet Master. This relationship between the Puppet Master and the puppet became a chief motif in Craig’s work (Taxidou, *Modernism and Performance* 231). The puppet figure also recurred in other distinctly Modernist works: Stravinsky’s ballet *Petrushka* (1911) and Picasso, Cocteau and Satie’s animated puppets in the surrealist pageant *Parade* (1917). MacColl’s use of puppetry remains purely a method of parody, a political comment on the very nature of the hegemonic state. It is significant that, producing MacColl’s version of *The Good Soldier Schweik*, the company actively rejected Piscator’s use of marionettes though they did retain, if only for a short while, the German director’s ideas on back-projection (Goorney and MacColl xliii). For MacColl, puppetry seemingly evoked concepts of repression, control and subjugation of individualised thought. It was an idea later employed by John McGrath of 7:84 in his production *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil*, in which Lord Polwarth is controlled with puppet strings by Texas Jim and Whitehall in order to expose the exploitation of Scottish oil (68).

Brecht unwittingly explains the dialectic of a play such as *Uranium 235*, when he asserts that “theatre remains theatre even when it is instructive theatre, and in so far as it is good theatre it will amuse” (Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre* 73). The folk tradition also came directly out of the people and, according to A.E. Green, “only theatre which grows out of and exists for little aggregations of people—whether a rural village or a city street—can ever be popular in any useful sense” (Bradby et al. 141). It is this correlation of entertainment, pedagogy and inextricable connection with the people that marks *Uranium 235* as such an effective play. Taking the most productive elements of working-class popular culture and combining them with a thematic concern of such gravity produces a play that responds directly to the bombing of Hiroshima (Goorney 50) while also providing an amusing spectacle for an audience that associated the show, not with

avant-garde theatre but with their own everyday sources of entertainment: “they treated the play as they would have treated an exciting game of football” (MacColl, *Journeyman* 251).

CHAPTER FOUR

"BEING PREPARED TO SALVAGE ALL THAT WAS BEST IN THE THEATRE OF THE PAST" PART TWO: THE LITERARY TRADITION

A theatre which will encapsulate the great soaring universe of Aeschylus and Sophocles, the
mocking, laughter-filled firmament of Aristophanes and Jonson, the whirling galaxies of
Shakespeare and those who shared their drunken dreams in the taverns of sixteenth- and
seventeenth-century London...
(MacColl, *Journeyman* 236)

i The oral and the literary

MacColl's interest in the theatre of previous generations was not limited only to the oral tradition, to the Mummers' Plays and festival pageants. His plays also reveal a continuous preoccupation with a specific literary tradition, drawing on the dramatic constructions of ancient Greece, the satirical humour of Jonson, the metatheatricality of Shakespeare. Indeed, MacColl's plays often reveal a juxtaposition of the oral and the literary, a discernible reliance on an identifiable script alongside an insistence on the elements of improvisation, of music, of physicality associated with the oral tradition. The traditions do not negate the other but rather co-exist dialectically within a single work. As Bruce Rosenberg argues in his discussions of the oral tradition more generally, "far from being its executioner, writing coexists peacefully with orality" (38). Indeed, the urban folk movement which MacColl's plays contribute to is based largely on this amalgamation of literary text and orality, originating in and perpetuated by "chapbooks, broadsheets and broadside ballads" (Cowan ed. 159). His early childhood reminiscences reflect the impact of this tradition. He recollected the songbook-sellers who visited the streets to sell the chapbooks: "a hundred or two or three hundred songs, very, very, poorly printed, all the latest songs" (Samuel et al. 213). The literary and the oral coexist in these chapbooks.

One of the most noticeable examples of this amalgamation of traditions in MacColl's canon is his adaptation of Molière's *The Flying Doctor*, discussed in the previous chapter. Molière certainly scripted his play and yet he incorporated the acrobatics, stock characters and disguise of a *commedia dell'arte* tradition. The two traditions, conventionally deemed as binary opposites, peaceably cohabit the text and MacColl retains these original conventions. MacColl's theatre, as always, reflects a multiplicity of dramatic forms and traditions. In addition to the folk forms

that, as Chapter Three revealed, were of considerable importance for his work, his canon also consistently reveals a perceptible literariness, a focus on the written text and language. And particular, well-established literary tradition perpetually informs both his aesthetic and the company's choice of plays throughout Theatre Workshop's history.

Theatre Workshop performed an interesting array of plays from a very specific literary tradition. For instance, the company produced a version of Hans Chlumberg's *Miracle at Verdun*, in MacColl's terms, an "anti-war play" (Samuel et al. 252). First produced by Andre van Gyseghem in 1932, this is a play of pertinent and revelatory prophesying. It is a prophetic play set in 1939, twenty-five years after the outbreak of the Great War and, though Chlumberg was unaware of it at the time of writing, also the year that the Second World War would begin. The play describes the difference between the Great War and the predicted war to come. Overtusch, the German Chancellor, asserts that "the next war will be a grim battle of chemists! A war of bacteriology!! (...) A nation may be robbed of its artillery but it cannot be robbed of its intellect" (32). The play, like MacColl's later anti-nuclear play *Uranium 235*, identifies the damaging potential of scientific development. Like *Uranium 235* or *Landscape with Chimneys*, *Miracle at Verdun* questions the purpose of war and discusses its destructive effect on society. The resurrected soldiers who return to life due to the 'miracle at Verdun' are treated with disdain; government officials remain content to ignore the suffering in their countries and, in a similar manner to the ubiquitous hegemonic politicians and army generals in MacColl's *The Travellers*, plan for another war instead.

In addition Littlewood also directed Lope de Vega's *Fuente Ovejuna* (circa 1612) in 1937. MacColl and the company did update *Fuente Ovejuna* while maintaining the spirit of the original. He recalls that the play "had been conceived, like many of the English Elizabethan plays, as a play with music...and we wrote a hell of a lot of new songs, new words to Spanish tunes— not our words, but Lopez's [sic] words" (Woods, *Folk Review* June 1973 4). A powerful play presenting the resistance of social inferiors, the production of *Fuente Ovejuna* was timely, staged during the Spanish Civil War, echoing the struggles against fascism that the company's comrades participated in (Goorney 17). The battle against fascism in Spain became an important thematic concern for the company and influenced much of its work during the pre-Second World War period. The company was also producing events and dramas at Aid for Spain meetings (Samuel et al. 253) and

actively campaigning against fascism. The production of *Fuente Ovejuna* was part of this active campaign against the rising force of fascism. It was also a critique of class relations, and this aspect of the play must have appealed to MacColl's aesthetic and political sensibilities. Servant Ortuño's conclusion that "that's the way it goes/ if you're a servant; you must either suffer/ in silence, and get on, or else get out" (97) reveals the crux of Lope de Vega's play; the lower class characters seemingly have two choices, neither of which involve direct action against their oppressors. As the play progresses the solidarity of the community becomes evident, paralleling the solidarity of the Theatre Workshop company with the dissident voices in 1930s Spain.

In 1945 the company returned to the Spanish theme with a production of Lorca's *The Love of Don Perlimplin and Belisa in the Garden*. It is a play of poetic dialogue, of the musical interweaving of voices and is somewhat reminiscent of MacColl's later experiments in German Expressionism. Its eroticism marks it as a direct challenge to generally accepted standards of decency. When Theatre Workshop performed it in the immediate post-war period, it did not appeal to the Theatre Workshop audience. MacColl was puzzled:

Was it, perhaps, Belisa's frank avowal of innocent lust that outraged them?
Or was it merely that any public declaration of sexual passion or any mention
of sexual deprivation made them nervous? (MacColl, *Journeyman* 249).

The Theatre Workshop audience were evidently disturbed by the play's explicit content, its vehement challenge to theatrical norms and received moralities. Theatre Workshop did not, however, choose this play only for its eroticism; Lorca was himself a martyr of the early days of the Spanish Civil War.

After MacColl's separation from Theatre Workshop, the company began to perform a variety of plays from the dramatic canon. From Marlowe's *Edward II* (1956) and Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* (1953) to more modern plays such as Brecht's *Mother Courage* (1955), Littlewood and Theatre Workshop presented plays that could challenge both actor and audience alike. They refused to dismiss the dramatic theatrical canon as outmoded or inherently associated with the bourgeois. Instead the company reappropriates plays for, it hoped, a new working-class audience. But this policy had been set in place while MacColl was still with them and in addition to staging productions of plays throughout the literary dramatic canon, they also performed a number by MacColl that were based on plays by other playwrights. His adaptations of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* (*Operation Olive Branch*)

and Ben Jonson's *The Devil is an Ass* (*Hell is What You Make It*) are amongst his greatest achievements, maintaining the satirical incisiveness of the original works and supplementing them with contemporary references, additional characters, changes of focus and a preoccupation with socio-political change.

In his response to classic plays, MacColl's attitude resembles Brecht's approach. Like MacColl, Brecht was fascinated by the classical literary tradition and constructed his own interpretation of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*. The dialogue published in *Brecht on Theatre* which discusses this, features a great many amendments to the canonical Shakespearian text. Like MacColl he refuses to see the play as a fixed entity. Brecht rejects the traditional stage directions by stating that "no edition of Shakespeare has stage directions, apart from those presumed to be added later" (258) and changes many of the incidents of the play including the entrance of Marcius (259) and his focus on the people rather than the hero so that he has "armed the plebeians better than ever before in theatrical history" (258). When W. asks the pertinent question "can we amend Shakespeare?" the response is "I think we can amend Shakespeare if we can amend him" (259). *Coriolanus* is not restricted to text and conventional tradition, but is developed, changed, renovated. R. enquires "do you think that all this and the rest of it can be read in the play?" and B.'s response parallels MacColl's own attitude to the theatrical canon:

Read in it and read into it (264).

Brecht refers to this approach as textual vandalism. William Yuill discusses Brecht's vandalistic attitude, stating that the playwright treats his "dramatic heritage as a source of raw material rather than as a collection of museum pieces" (6). In a conversation between Brecht and Ihering after the latter has written a monograph entitled *Reinhardt, Jessner, Piscator or the Death of the Classics* (1929), Brecht recalls that "for a while, our vandalistic efforts promised quite a lot, even though they were fought against every step of the way. There was already the prospect of saving the classic for our repertoire, not for the sake of the classic, but for the sake of the repertoire" (Brecht, *Brecht on Art and Politics* 79). The classics, according to Brecht, should no longer be an esoteric body of work, stable and fixed, but a tradition in flux available to engage fully with new repertoires, theatrical conventions and, indeed, the contemporary world at large. This action reinvigorates the established tradition. MacColl, I suggest, would have agreed with these critics. He studied the popular theatre of the past such as the "French Theatre of Molière" and the "Spanish theatre of the Golden Age" and conceded that "all seemed to draw strongly on a common stock of experience, of myths and traditions" (MacColl,

Grassroots 62). MacColl imagines a type of lineage in which playwrights interpolate past traditions into their own work, vandalising the theatrical modes of early epochs in order to produce new, innovative work in the contemporary world.

The concept of creative vandalism, of looting the dramatic literary tradition in order to present the play in a different manner, is of great assistance in understanding MacColl's own response. He, too, is also a vandal and his two 'adaptation plays' reveal differing methods of vandalism and differing responses to the original dramatic text.

ii "I don't think we'll see peace again in our time...unless something untoward should happen": *Lysistrata* and *Operation Olive Branch*

In the Theatre Union study course compiled by MacColl and Littlewood in 1940, one era of theatre dominates. Littlewood writes that "it was considered mere philandering to read latter-day classics, let alone modern plays, unless you'd acquired a thorough grounding in the ancients" (Littlewood, *Joan's Book* 764). Therefore the first reading list consists of a directory of specific cultural facets of ancient Greek society—the cult of Dionysus, religious ritual, and mime and dance. Particular plays are also suggested, from the tragedies of Sophocles to the bawdy comedies of Aristophanes. This opening list concludes with a selection of secondary reading matter that explores the political, cultural and artistic characteristics of ancient Greece. Although comparable lists were composed for other epochs of theatrical innovation, it is interesting to note that Theatre Union's study course began with a protracted study of Greek theatre. A Constructivist Russian version of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* is included in Leon Mousinnac's book, a text that, as mentioned in Chapter Two, was extremely influential in the development of the Theatre Workshop aesthetic. Although it remains speculation, MacColl may well have taken his inspiration from the platforms, pillars and rotating stage of this production (Mousinnac plate 96). Certainly, from the surviving photographs of Theatre Workshop's production this would seem to be the case¹¹².

Lysistrata was attempted twice by Theatre Union /Workshop. The first performance occurred in 1940-1. Rehearsals began during the first months of the German bombardment of British cities and the company performed the play in

¹¹² For published photographs see Leach, *Theatre Workshop* 190 and Holdsworth 19.

January 1941 (Goorney 24). MacColl then revised the ‘straight’ translation¹¹³ they used the first time, creating additional scenes and renaming it *Operation Olive Branch*. This play was produced by Joan Littlewood in 1947 and toured alongside *Johnny Noble*, *The Flying Doctor* and *Uranium 235*. MacColl was evidently not the first playwright to ‘vandalise’ ancient Greek plays and this classical tradition remains pre-eminent in the Modernist canon. Anouilh and Cocteau, the French Existentialists, rewrote Greek myth in order to create innovative dramatic experiences (Arnott 227), Anouilh appropriating *Antigone* while Cocteau wrote a version of *Oedipus Rex* for the composer, Stravinsky. Earlier the Cambridge Ritualists created a specific Modernist Hellenism with a theatrical focus which was arguably of great importance to MacColl’s own later aesthetic. During the nineteenth century “classics in both universities [Oxbridge] was textual study, narrowly conceived” (Ackerman 93). Rather than textualising the ancient Greek tradition the Ritualists examined the common practices of Hellenic society, studying ritual, myth, and indeed a specific Hellenic oral tradition. They noted a perceptible genealogy between the ancient Greek tradition and the oral tradition throughout Europe, holding that the ritual of what they called Eniautos-Daimon, a ceremony of death and resurrection “with its attendant *mythos* lives on in the Mummers’ Play and Carnival Festivals still performed at spring time all over modern Europe” (Ackerman 128). So the oral and literary traditions are not diametrically opposed but co-exist in a mutually beneficial relationship and, indeed, are part of the same aesthetic lineage. This helped to give the ancient Greeks a relevance for MacColl. In incorporating emblems of ancient Greek culture, he can readily be associated with this Modernist tradition, a connection which remains an important and readily discernible aspect of twentieth- and twenty-first century theatre with plays such as Ted Hughes’ *Oedipus* and Richard Schechner’s *Dionysus in 69*.

There are, of course, many similarities between the original¹¹⁴ *Lysistrata* and MacColl’s *Operation Olive Branch*. The female characters retain their names and events occur much as they do in *Lysistrata*. The women meet, the old men of the senate are challenged, the women spurn their husbands’ advances and eventually the war ceases. Both plays could accurately be entitled ‘peace plays’ and describe the

¹¹³ It is likely that the company used the 1938 translation of *Lysistrata* by Benjamin Bickley Rodgers, though this remains speculative.

¹¹⁴ ‘Original’ is evidently a contentious term. What is an original? Does a specific play ever have a discernible origin? Graham Holderness suggests that “the text is multiple, iterable, subject to an inevitable law of change. It is never original, always copied” (IV). By using the term original here, I mean the play that MacColl took as primary catalyst for his adaptation.

effects of war on ordinary people and city rulers alike. There is also the perpetual metaphor of male/female relations. *Lysistrata*, Kenneth McLeish suggests, “is about frustration, not licence, and sexual fulfilment is a metaphor for the release that will come with peace” (233): a play that analyses the war through human experience, through the intimate relations of individuals. MacColl retains this element and incorporates the “deeper human dimension” (Segal ed. 157) of Aristophanes’ play into his own. However, there are also many differences between the plays, and for a theatre researcher the distinctions between MacColl’s *Operation Olive Branch* and the ancient Greek original reveal something of his intentions, both theatrically and politically. The title page describes *Operation Olive Branch* as “freely adapted from the *Lysistrata* of Aristophanes”. The influence of Aristophanes’ original is evident in this description, but equally discernible is MacColl’s active decision to create a free adaptation, employing *Lysistrata* as a catalyst and starting point but not confining his play. This is not a direct translation or a modern republication of an English version, but a reappraisal and appropriation of a pre-existent source.

When MacColl decided to ‘vandalise’ an ancient Greek play he could well have chosen a tragedy such as *Antigone* in order to confront the growth of fascism and the ever-increasing threat of war. Instead he selected a comedy. His reason for choosing such a play here is perhaps explained by analogy to Bakhtin’s conclusions on the place of laughter in the theatrical experience: “laughter has deep, philosophical meaning, it is one of the essential forms of the truth concerning the world as a whole” (66). Roy Flickinger in *The Greek Theater and its Drama*, a book on the company’s reading list, contrasts the objectives and achievements of comedy and tragedy in Greek theatre as follows:

Comedy was more mobile and reacted more quickly to the actual conditions of contemporaneous life; tragedy was more conventional, could never free itself entirely from the power of tradition, and could only slowly modify that tradition (171).

Just as in the comedy of the Festival of Fools and the oral tradition, the laughter of the Athenian theatre could challenge, confront and uncover, could act as a means of explaining, revealing and exposing. In using Aristophanes’ play and the Greek comedic tradition as, in Margot Heinemann’s term, a “mine of discoveries” (Dollimore and Sinfield 243), MacColl could reveal the actual material realities outwith the confines of the theatre building. Furthermore, “comedy alone of Greek literary genres, combines all the registers of Greek utterance which are known to us:

at one extreme a solemnity evocative of heroic warfare and gorgeous processions, at the other a vulgarity inadmissible in polite discourse" (Dover 72). Aristophanes' Old Comedy could juxtapose different, often profoundly contrasting sequences together, and as we have seen throughout MacColl's canon, this paralleling of episodes is a primary structural method. One of the major similarities between all the theatrical movements that influenced him is their rejection of linear narrative and adoption of an episodic structural method. Expressionism, Constructivism, the Mummerys' tradition and the festival form all reveal this technique, and it can be perceived in the earlier tradition of Greek Old Comedy. Old Comedy is anti-Aristotelian, flexible, less regulated than either tragedy or the New Comedy of Menander. In addition there is an assumption that tragedy's concerns are those of the upper classes and comedy is best suited to a lower-class (in MacColl's case, a working-class) audience. Indeed, while tragedy generally focused on royalty or the aristocracy the characters in the comedic tradition could be servants; as Raymond Williams acknowledges, tragedy emphasises rank and the heroic man (Oedipus, Hamlet, Othello) is explicitly associated with his economic and political background. Williams argues that man of rank's "fate was the fate of the house or kingdom which he once ruled and embodied" (Draper ed. 185). He reflects on a generally held "definition of tragedy as dependent on the history of a man of rank...some deaths mattered more than others, and rank was the actual dividing line- the death of a slave or a retainer was no more than incidental and was certainly not tragic" (184). However, as becomes clear through close reading of the text, MacColl's vandalising play does not present comedy and tragedy as diametrically opposed. His is a mixed generic form: a mixture evident in much of the Modernist theatre canon.

It is also crucial to note that comedies of Aristophanes are primarily part of an oral tradition rather than a literary one. The ancient Greek audience had little cause to create a distinction between the dramatic text and the performative text: so "this was a culture that accorded low status to the written word" (Wiles 167). In his book discussing Attic Theatre, Francis Cornford, one of the Cambridge Ritualists, certainly connects the Greek theatre (and specifically Aristophanes) with an oral tradition, and even connects the ancient Greek comedic mode with the British oral tradition in the form of the Mummerys' Play.

Lysistrata and the vandalised version *Operation Olive Branch* remain generically complex plays. Although it might well be most accurately defined as a

comedy, the general theme of unrelenting war and suffering creates a certain sense of gravity. As Croix asserts, “scattered throughout the play are passages which demand to be taken seriously, even if they are mixed in with pure comedy” (Segal ed. 62). One such episode in *Lysistrata* was retained by MacColl due to its powerful and insightful imagery. *Lysistrata* concludes that the state is like wool. Wool requires cleaning to “wash the grease out”, then the knots need to be extracted and the wool carded, and finally, the “stray bits and pieces of the fleece” (suggestive of the Athenian colonies) need to be picked up and united together. It is an astute analogy rejected as “nonsense” by the Magistrate who is arguing with her but recognised as incisive and true by the audience (Aristophanes 204). MacColl retains this speech almost in its entirety and concludes it with “do that in the state, get rid of the filth” (MacColl 31). Within the comedy of *Lysistrata* this passage marks a profound contrast, an interruption, and in retaining this episode MacColl acknowledges that it remains powerful for a twentieth-century audience. The overarching thematic concern of unrelenting warfare and the integration of solemnity and humour were probably the dual bases for MacColl’s interest in this specific play. His version takes the playtext and develops theme and character while maintaining many of the original elements. As Graham Holderness argues “bibliography now accepts textuality as a history of change” (I) and it is in these sometimes slight, sometimes substantial changes that *Operation Olive Branch* reveals its meaning.

Before we examine the modifications by MacColl it may well be valuable to look in greater depth at what these two theatres have in common. The audience of ancient Greek drama included both the richest and most well-respected members of Athenian society and the poorest plebeians. The open-air theatres were immense and designed to hold individuals from every echelon of society. There is substantial evidence to suggest that women, children and slaves were occasionally in attendance (Hough 329). Enjoyment of ancient Greek theatre was not the privilege of a small elite group. MacColl remained convinced that “we wanted our audience to be a working-class one, it was as simple as that, we weren’t interested in anything else” (Samuel et al. 241). There is an evident contrast here as Aristophanes would not have excluded the upper echelons of social hierarchy, MacColl would. Theatre Workshop’s history would reveal that this was a difficult thing to achieve, but an unadulterated working-class audience was the initial aim. Ancient Greek theatre marked a tradition that encouraged participation and attendance from all levels of society. Furthermore, the Greek audience’s attitude and response to the plays must

have appealed to MacColl's own sense of audience involvement and the destruction of the ubiquitous fourth wall which separated the auditorium into two disproportionate halves. Hough continues, "the Athenians were a lively audience, and gave expression to their feelings in a most unmistakable manner" (343). Theatre Workshop's productions encouraged a similar audience response, for instance in *Uranium 235* when "every scene, including the Atom Ballet was applauded, sometimes cheered, as though it was indeed a Variety Show" (Goorney 52). This audience response is particularly associated with the comedic form. For a twentieth-century working-class audience acquainted with genres such as pantomime, Punch and Judy shows and Music Hall, comedy could most effectively engage spectators. Although the type of interaction and working-class audience demographic of the Butlins' *Uranium 235* proved increasingly hard for Theatre Workshop to achieve, the sense of collectivity between the audience and actors as seen in the theatre of ancient Greece remained something to emulate and admire.

The company's interaction with *Lysistrata* occurred during one of the most turbulent and bloody periods in twentieth-century history. There are a variety of reasons why MacColl and Theatre Workshop might have emulated and studied the ancient Greek stage, but the parallel political situations in Aristophanes' Athens and MacColl's Britain could certainly be one of them. Britain faced, in the words of the *Second Manifesto of Theatre Union*, "times of great social upheaval...faced with an ever-increasing danger of war and fascism" (Goorney 26). The threat of war and the burgeoning menace of fascism pervades many of MacColl's plays, from the depiction of the Spanish Civil War in *Last Edition* to the seemingly unstoppable rush towards a third world war of *The Travellers*. The ever-present shadow of war is inescapable for artists, playwrights and authors during the first half of the twentieth century. With two major world wars and the ever-increasing threat of fascism, this period was defined by instability. There was a similar situation in Aristophanes' Athens. The Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta raged between 431 BC and 404 BC and, in spite of peace treaties and heavy losses on both sides, continued ferociously throughout this period. Indeed, "the 'Fifty Year' and the Peloponnesian War are the background to the entire great period of Athenian drama" (McLeish 23). The primary theme of these two plays then, though separated by over two millennia remains the same. Ancient Greece is often romanticised as a place of democracy and advancement of civilisation. The Athens of MacColl's plays is certainly not the Athens of education and progress, and marks a reaction against this idealised Hellenism. Like Brecht in his adaptation of *Antigone*, he "sees

in the ‘Greeks’ not the taming, civilising *gestus* that leads to progress and civilisation but the barbarism that results from empire and war” (Taxidou, *Modernism and Performance* 253). This was undoubtedly MacColl’s perception of ancient Greek society too. The inclusion of women, children and slaves in the audience demographic may well suggest the advent of democracy, but ancient Greek society was equally defined by war and violence. Indeed, his critique of Athenian civilisation can be discerned in the opening sequences of another of his plays, *Uranium* 235. In response to the convoluted speech of Democritus and the religious chanting of the worshippers, the first actor interrupts, informing his colleagues that he refuses to perpetuate the traditional myths about ancient Greece. He argues that “Athens wasn’t the paradise the Victorians cracked it up to be. It was a powerful military state founded on slave labour” (84). This image of Greek society as an authoritarian dictatorship repressing those perceived to be insignificant in the social hierarchy is the image affirmed by *Operation Olive Branch*.

If the political climates of the two periods contain certain parallels, MacColl was perhaps even more influenced by the aesthetics of the ancient Greek theatre. Indeed, much of the avant-garde theatre of the early twentieth century revisited the techniques associated with the ancient Greek stage. The *mise-en-scène* consisted of a platform stage with little attempt create illusion. Just as the narrator in *Johnny Noble* encourages the audience to “come back with us a dozen years or so, back to the early thirties, to the derelict towns and the idle hands, the rusting lathes and the silent turbines” (36), on the platform stage of the Greek theatre “it is usually enough for the actor or chorus to indicate the scene with a few introductory words” (Arnott 39). Ancient Athens also saw the inauguration of stage mechanisation with a flying machine for gods and a moving rostrum for composed tableaux which could be wheeled onto the main stage. Multiple platforms were of course used centuries later by the Russian Constructivists— and by MacColl. This is evident even in his earliest surviving piece, *John Bullion*, in which the stage is divided into three levels; in Greek theatre “all pretence of realism and illusion were abandoned” (Hough¹¹⁵ 210). The ancient Greek audience had to develop a sense of imagination and the actors became the primary focus, so with the Constructivists and as with MacColl.

Plays in the genre of Old Comedy, like many of MacColl’s plays, were constructed in a highly metatheatrical manner, and composed episodically. It is

¹¹⁵ AE Hough’s *The Attic Theatre* is on the Theatre Union reading list quoted above and, therefore, it can be assumed that MacColl was aware of its conclusions.

interesting to see how this specific structural method has influenced MacColl's work, not just in *Operation Olive Branch*, but throughout his canon. The play began with a *prologue* and then went on to the *parodos*, the entrance song of the chorus (Flickinger 40). Such metatheatrical opening sequences remain prevalent in MacColl's own work. A prime example of this can be discerned in the Stage Manager's welcoming speech in *Landscape with Chimneys* or in the opening sung section of *Johnny Noble*. Old Comedy then progressed to the *agon* or dramatised debate, the *parabasis* during which the chorus address the audience directly and a series of episodes (Flickinger 40). These elements can again be discerned in MacColl's dramatic canon. His plays are characterised by debate (the conversation between Lorentz and his wife Katherine regarding the potential for revolution is a prime example of MacColl's active construction of debate) and metatheatricality, as mentioned in Chapter Two, defines his dramatic style even in his most naturalistic plays. Flickinger insists that Old Comedy ends with the *exodus*, the chorus recession (40). The final sequence of *John Bullion* in which the cast vacate the stage to the 'Internationale' and the final song of *Landscape with Chimneys*, 'Which Side Are You On?', both reflect this tradition. So we can see the influence of the Greek tradition throughout MacColl's canon. He not only adapts one Old Comedy text in its entirety, but also uses the tradition as a "mine of discoveries".

Due to the non-illusionistic nature of both stages, the actor becomes pre-eminent. The ancient Greek theatre is a dramatic tradition dominated by movement and language. Music and dance became prominent arts forms (Arnott 21). Actors were accomplished, combining "the frank enjoyment of children's make believe with the skill and physical discipline of ballet" (Arnott 218). The similarities here to MacColl's theatrical priorities, and especially to his work in collaboration with Laban are marked; delight in movement and the ability to control the body effectively are the two pre-eminent features of Laban's writings. The Greek theatre also employed local non-actors for the choruses. Although MacColl dispenses with the convention of the chorus, Theatre Workshop's productions do reflect the general intentions of this practice. The chorus could comment on the action without the confines of character conventions that a twentieth-century audience would be familiar with. The choruses were also composed of local people, thereby creating a sense of community that would be later replicated in Theatre Workshop, which aimed to create a real understanding of notions of democracy and collectivity, whether successfully or not.

Where there are perceptible similarities between the two plays, there are also some notable differences. William Yuill examined the importance of these divergences during his critique of Brechtian vandalism:

The original—provided it is sufficiently well-known—can be made to act as a sounding-board for the modern work. Contrasts between original and adaptation should provoke a critical response on the part of the audience (7). There is, of course, an immediately perceptible problem here. MacColl's audience, or at least his intended audience, would probably not have been aware of Aristophanes' original play, but for theatre researchers such contrasts are valuable.

With the actor as the pre-eminent figure, MacColl was able to focus on character. He retains many of the original characters of Aristophanes' work, but also includes a selection of new personalities, so that the original text is developed and changed, creating new meaning: "there is no immanent or permanent meaning; all meaning is generated anew by acts of imagination" (Holderness III). MacColl's inclusion of new characters is certainly an "act of imagination" that transforms the original play; *Lysistrata* becomes a catalyst rather than a concrete template. His new characters perform a very specific role and denote particular thematic concerns. Brecht asserts that "purpose makes the style... And the worst thing you can do is hold on to something that no longer has a purpose, just because it used to be beautiful" (Brecht, *Brecht on Art and Politics* 81). Brecht-fashion, MacColl reinvigorates the purpose of *Lysistrata* and consequentially remodels the play.

The addition of the soldiers transforms *Lysistrata* from a comedy with serious undertones about peace to an even more generically complex play about war and its consequences. Aristophanes' play opens with the meeting of the women under the direction of Lysistrata. By contrast, MacColl only introduces the women in the second scene, commencing his play with a tableau of soldiers playing cards. This group of men reappear throughout the play. They are uneducated, "they never taught me how to write; only how to kill" (3)—and bestialised; the Second Soldier argues that a soldier is "the lowest of all the things that walk; he's even lower than a flea. His only purpose in life is to provide dinners for worms" (33). They remain unnamed, except Calonice's husband Cinesias (who is a primary character in *Lysistrata*), and are referred to only by number, thereby revealing the dehumanising nature of the army. However, in spite of the numerical system of identification, the soldiers do retain some individuality, a fact unrecognised by the ruling old men. The Third Soldier is writing a letter to his lover; the deserter (unnumbered) with his

sense of nationalism is Myrrine's husband. Indeed, the soldiers are remarkably similar to those in Jaroslav Hašek's novel *The Good Soldier Schweik*. MacColl remained fascinated by Hašek's portrayal of First World War soldiers and reflects that "both Joan and I had read Hasek's [sic] novel some years before [the Theatre Workshop production of Hašek's story] and had fallen in love with it" (Goorney and MacColl xlii). MacColl's version of *Schweik*, influenced as we have seen by Piscator's production, retains Hašek's sense of the satirical, presenting the oppressed soldiers and the blasé generals who are more concerned with the maintenance of social hierarchy than the survival of their men. This attitude is reflected in Schweik's inadvertently insightful comments:

It stands to reason: the more the enemy fires at you, the quicker he uses up all his ammunition. Every time the enemy uses a bullet to kill one of us, his chances of putting up a good fight get less (MacColl, *Schweik* III-32).

The similarities between Schweik's reflections and those of the soldiers in *Operation Olive Branch* are marked. In the opening scene, the Third Soldier declares that "a soldier doesn't need a reputation, all he needs is a good sword, keen sight and segs¹¹⁶ on his feet. The rest is superfluous" (1). In MacColl's plays soldiers reflect on their lowly position in the military hierarchy and yet retain an element of distinctiveness that the generals cannot fully repress. The generals might disregard them as pawns in their military strategy, but MacColl consistently presents his soldiers potentially revolutionary. The idea of individual thought and potential is similarly evident at the end of *Johnny Noble*, in which the dead man (just referred to as Man) reminds Johnny of his role in transforming a society now at peace, of his "job to be done" (66).

In Aristophanes' and MacColl's plays, there is a demonstrable difference between the attitudes and prospects of the soldiers and those in positions of power. According to *Lysistrata* in Aristophanes' original play, the old men of the senate "ruin Greece with mad intestine wars" (227). MacColl identifies this disparity in *Operation Olive Branch* and it becomes one of the core thematic concerns of his vandalising play. If his soldiers are presented as pawns in an international conflict which they have no control over, the old men of the government are portrayed as foolish, concerned with power and money. This is exemplified by Draces' question,

¹¹⁶ According to the OED, 'segs' means a "metal stud attached to the toe or heel of a shoe (or boot) to strengthen or protect it from wear". Presumably the Soldier means that as long as the army recruit can walk, he can fight and is therefore of use to the generals; it is the physical rather than the intellectual characteristics of the soldier that are important for him to fulfil his role.

“have you any idea who our allies are now, Strymadorous?” (17). Philocleon’s reply— “ssh! Things change, boy, change! The people you praised yesterday you have to fight to-day” (18)— is reminiscent of the ever-changing relationships between three super-states Oceania, Eurasia and Eastasia in George Orwell’s *1984*. Allegiances change frequently and ordinary people have to accept this, while the hegemony pretends that particular national alliances have existed all along. One of the major changes that MacColl makes to Aristophanes’ text is to be found in the characters of the old men. In *Lysistrata* they are mainly a chorus. True, there is the Magistrate, who MacColl retains, whose objective in both plays is the “preservation of our institutions from extraneous and subversive influences” (MacColl, *Operation Olive Branch* 26), but generally the ruling class is a homogenous voice reacting to the deeds of the Greek women. MacColl, by contrast, creates a group of individualised reactionary conservatives, maintaining the precarious balance of power with a mixture of war and suppression of ideas. Indeed, Draces’ comment “nay, I don’t think we’ll see peace again in our time...unless something untoward should happen” (17) reveals the primary interest of the Senators: the maintenance of the status quo. This is further elucidated by the Magistrate’s speech to the old men:

And this enemy, my friends, fights not with sword and spears as decent men do but with ideas. General Cleon has said that we must beware [sic] of all foreign ideas because foreign ideas are unAthenian ideas. I would go further gentlemen, and say that we must beware of all ideas because, at this stage of our history, all ideas are unAthenian ideas (41).

The satirical focus here is evident. The House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAAC) was established at the end of the 1930s. Its aim was to identify any Communist ideas within the cultural industries of America. Interestingly, in the year Theatre Workshop toured this play (1947), HUAAC was trying the so-called Hollywood Ten. The Magistrate’s speech is a perceptibly contemporaneous image of twentieth-century issues.

If, as David Wiles suggests, “translation can be seen positively as part of a continuing process of renewal” (196) how much more a self-proclaimed “freely adapted [play] from the *Lysistrata* of Aristophanes” (MacColl, *Operation Olive Branch*), a distinct dramatic moment of renewal. MacColl does not only develop the characters of the senators, he also relates them explicitly to the contemporary situation. He incorporates some adopted Tennyson— “ours is not to reason why, ours is but to do and die” (21)— into Chremilous’ speech, thereby relating the ancient Greek text to a later battle (the Charge of the Light Brigade). Furthermore,

MacColl brings Aristophanes' narrative directly into the twentieth century with his presentation of Strymadorous, a thinly veiled portrait of Winston Churchill. This parallel is made explicit by Strymadorous' speech in which he states that "we must fight on the beaches, in the streets, in the clubs, in the barber's shops" (19). The similarity with Churchill's famous call for victory is obvious, but MacColl undermines this by introducing the banal images of clubs and barber's shops. Kenneth McLeish claims that "in the Aristophanic world, the serious is made ludicrous" (198) and MacColl seemingly integrates his own work. However, as mentioned, *Operation Olive Branch* is generically tricky as, though containing absurd dialogue, it maintains a striking seriousness.

Furthermore, *Lysistrata* is evidently a play about women. It challenges the perpetual warfare, but is also permeated with issues of gender relations and jokes regarding the place of women in contemporary society. Calonice's comment that they "must show that it's not for nothing that women are called impossible" (189) marks a central thematic concern of the play and creates much of the humour. The Leader concludes that "there is no beast so shameless as a woman" (195) and the concept of a woman adopting a leadership role within Athenian society would have been regarded with consternation and amusement. In MacColl's *Operation Olive Branch* the concept of gender relations, and particularly the role of women, becomes less pronounced; the integration of the soldiers is integral to this change in focus.

However, he does integrate a new relationship into the narrative. In *Lysistrata* it is the relationship between Myrrhine and her husband Cinesias that illustrates most acutely the effect the women's actions have. Myrrhine torments Cinesias by refusing to have sex with him (219). MacColl retains this relationship, but changes the characters; Cinesius (MacColl's spelling) is now married to Calonice. The scene in which the couple are reunited is as comic as the parallel incident in Aristophanes' original. Cinesius' speech to his wife is a moment of pure hyperbole, stating that "you [Calonice] are my Grecian ocean, and I, Odysseus" (64). This is not the central relationship in MacColl's play however; two other male/female relationships overshadow the hilarity of Cinesius' sexual frustration. The first is the relationship between Myrrhine and the deserter. Myrrhine is evidently desperate to greet her husband when he returns on leave, as she pretends she is having a baby in order to go to him (56). However, he has been killed as a deserter by another soldier. The audience is aware of her husband's fate but

Myrrhine remains ignorant. Much as Brecht asserts that the theatre “must furnish accurate images of incidents between people, and allow the spectator to adopt a standpoint” (Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre* 170), MacColl does not provide a scene of grief for Myrrhine, so the audience is compelled to retain a critical response, employing imaginative skills in order to explore potential reactions to needless death at war. The second relationship gives a somewhat cyclical structure to the whole play. In the first scene the Third Soldier is writing a letter to his beloved. Despite his protestations that he cannot write effectively, his language is beautifully poetic:

Her eyes were the colour of a swallow’s wings and as deep as Mare Aegeum.

The touch of her hair used to make my nerves sing like a harp (3).

The relationship is however tinged with tragedy; he reflects that she was “sold to a slave-farmer in Thrace, to be used for stud purposes” (3), though this horrific image of separation and oppression is presented once again through V-Effekt, as the soldier concludes this sentence by referring to the card game they are playing: “should we play another hand?” (ibid). And in the final section of the play after peace is declared, once the Third Soldier has reflected that even in war the social hierarchy remains stable and concrete, he decides to go and search for his beloved in Thrace. Perhaps peace will engender new possibilities and freedoms for the soldiers. The end of this play is reminiscent of the conclusions of many other MacColl plays. Thus Johnny in *Johnny Noble* vows to transform the world after the visitation of the dead soldier (Man) and in *Landscape with Chimneys* Ginger affirms through song that “I’m going to take a good sharp axe,/ Shining steel, tempered in the fire,/ Will chop you down like an old dead tree./ Dirty old town, dirty old town” (71). Though the plays contain tragic circumstances, war, repression and poverty, they all conclude with a perceptible note of optimism.

Why would MacColl transform the play’s male/female relationships so dramatically? Why is the humour somewhat undermined by death and subjugation? MacColl’s play *The Long Winter*, written during the 1940s, seemingly casts some light on the playwright’s intentions. Based loosely on the Greek myth of Agamemnon returning from war, this is a play which reflects on the effect of war on relationships. Soldier Chris’s return on leave becomes a tragic indictment of the state of society at war as his wife Marion murders him in order to continue a relationship with her lover Alec. Chris’s attitude to the war is similar to that of the soldiers in *Operation Olive Branch*, who all dwell on the futility of warfare and the personal dangers for those on the front line. Just as they discern their lowly position

in society and the seeming inevitability of death, Chris asserts that the working class “built the world and in return they got a slice of bread and margarine and the privilege of killing each other” (29). The working class, who, as evident in a play such as *Landscape with Chimneys*, experience difficulties in peacetime, discover that their circumstances are exacerbated still further by war. In both these plays, through the murder of the deserter in *Operation Olive Branch* and the death of Chris in *The Long Winter*, MacColl seemingly suggests that in war morality and the relationship between death and life becomes blurred. The Fourth Soldier believes that he is doing his duty when he stabs the deserter, but his colleagues denounce him saying that he “killed out of envy” (52). Was this an act to be applauded or denounced? When Marion shoots Chris the audience recognises a number of moral questions. Chris resents his forced participation in the war: he is prone to “war-weariness, a disease that makes living an effort and all effort seem superfluous” (54); Marion’s actions preclude Chris from returning to war and, therefore, in one sense, ‘liberate’ him from his incarceration in the army. The over-arching question of the play relates to the concept of personal happiness; in war, when life appears so fragile and impermanent, should one strive only for personal happiness? The personal and the international collide in a similar manner in *Operation Olive Branch*, in which marital relations and the futility of conflict are juxtaposed. War alters the morality system; death becomes ambivalent (whose life is it legitimate to take? when should death be valorised and welcomed?), and life becomes uncertain (should one strive for personal gain or has one a duty to a ‘greater’ cause?). Indeed Marion suggests that war has transformed the very nature of murder as an act. She asks, “what is a human life worth these days? Who stops to think when someone dies? Why, every week a generation dies and no one notices. Whole cities are murdered in a single night and in a month they are forgotten” (23).

The similarities here between one play based on a Greek comedy and another on a Greek tragedy reveal the tenuousness of generic classifications. MacColl does not create tragedy or comedy *per se*, but rather his canon reveals an intense preoccupation with working-class life in all its fullness, thereby combining comic events and language with tragic incidents: death, war, broken marital relationships, and the subjugation of soldiers. “Our aim, we said, was a theatre which would reflect the ideas and needs of the working class” (Samuel et al. 242) and this included both the innate sense of humour that MacColl perceived within his working-class community and the affliction that arose from poverty, lack of social standing and a knowledge that aspiration and ambition were futile.

There is another reason why MacColl would vandalise a play such as Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*. This relates to Aristophanes' use of language. In the original Greek script, Aristophanes included passages in a variety of indigenous dialects. For example, Lampito and those characters from Sparta speak in a Laconian accent (Colvin 117), a Doric dialect. Doric within Britain is readily associated with Lowland Scots, and this may be the reason why, in the Penguin version of *Lysistrata* at least, Lampito speaks in Scots:

I'll thank ye not tae treat me as though ye were just aboot tae sacrifice me
(183).

Analogously, Dudley Fitts in his celebrated American version in the 1950s has the Spartans speaking in a Deep Southern dialect; for example after peace is declared and Lysistrata addresses the armies in turn, a Spartan replies, "Ah admit it./ When Ah look at those legs, Ah sweah Ah can't trust mahself!" (Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* Fitts ed. 105). As mentioned in Chapter Three, MacColl's plays are permeated with examples of localised accent and dialect. Here he expands this use of dialect discernible within Aristophanes' original work, presenting Myrrine as the Scotswoman and Crytillice as Irish. This use of dialect, as we have seen, is a highly politicised act. MacColl's Communist convictions prescribe a united working class: one not divided by nationalism but unified by economics and social subjugation. The women in *Operation Olive Branch* provide an image of the potential for an effective united group. The play challenges the traditional national barriers created by war and mistrust. The relationship between the British mainland and Ireland has throughout the centuries been one of hostility and prejudice, which is initially reflected in Calonice's response to Crytillice (Corinthian/ Irish), as she asks "are there honest women in Corinth?" (8). Calonice, like much of the English population, perpetuates a stereotypical image of Irish dishonesty. However, the two women are able to engender a peaceful resolution to the war by dispelling previously held suppositions regarding one another and emphasising instead the inherent similarities in their positions. Taruna suggests that "to end the war...is the language of dreams, of our private thoughts" (11), and the intrinsic collectivity of this statement ("our private thoughts") transcends nationality and discrimination.

However, MacColl's employment of dialect is a little more complex than this initial, undoubtedly true, supposition would suggest. This ambiguity is most noticeable in Myrrine's husband the Deserter's, speech:

Whit's Athens to me that I should fecht for't? Whit has Athens ever brocht to Anagyra but dule and greetin'? Athens to me means the wastit croft and the fell evictions o' sib fowk (50).

Thirty years or so later, 7:84 (Scotland) were presenting *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil* to small Scottish communities. John McGrath's play discusses the three major causes of socio-economic change within Scotland: the Cheviot (the introduction of sheep farming), the Stag (the influx of foreign visitors who hunted through the Scottish countryside), and the Black, Black Oil (the discovery of oil in the North Sea). During the opening scenes of the play, McGrath notes the impact of large-scale sheep farming on the inhabitants of the Scottish crofts. In a similar manner to the MacColl of *Last Edition* or *Johnny Noble*, McGrath uses plain declamation to describe the effects of this economic expansion. The Reader declares that "the whole inhabitants of Kildonan parish, nearly 2000 souls, were utterly rooted and burned out. Many, especially the young and robust, left the country, but the aged, the females and children, were obliged to stay and accept the wretched allotments allowed them on the seashore and endeavour to learn fishing" (16-7). McGrath's objectives in this part of *The Cheviot* are surely similar to MacColl's intentions in *Operation Olive Branch*. Both are aware of the historical treatment of the crofters and the distress caused by the Clearances. The "dule and greetin'" that England and, indeed, the urban Scottish elite brought to the crofters is alluded to in both MacColl's adaptation play and, more overtly, in 7:84's later documentary drama. MacColl remained an advocate of a trans-national political movement, but also recognised the importance of retaining a localised identity. The Deserter's point remained: why should he fight for a country whose leaders have brought only oppression, economic exploitation and the disintegration of a localised culture? The question remained important for MacColl and McGrath alike.

An impression of community between actors and audience was promoted by the religious nature of Greek theatre. Drama was a constituent feature of Athenian religious festivals, and Aristophanes' plays featured in the city festivals, the Lenaea and City Dionysia (Bowie 10). This involvement with religion, then, might well seem to rule out any idea of using Aristophanes as a source for Marxist drama. However, the relationship between Marxism and religion has been a contentious one. Marx's preoccupation was with material actuality rather than idealism; his theories are consistently infused with the concepts of class struggle, economic determinism and political change, but the myth that Communism dispensed with the metaphysical in its entirety is not upheld by either the actual

artwork of left-wing politically engaged practitioners, nor indeed by the theories to which they would align themselves. Decades after Marx, Leon Trotsky for instance asserts the importance of looking to the art of the past rather than renouncing it entirely in favour of a wholly contemporaneous and material aesthetic. He argues that “if we were to groundlessly repudiate the art of the past, we should at once become poorer spiritually” (Trotsky 313). This is close to MacColl’s own attitude. As an ardent Marxist, he rejected religion out of hand, but in spite of a repudiation of religiosity, his theatre often incorporates and dialogues with religious ideas and images. His theatre, from the Mummerys of *St George and the Dragon* to the New Man of *The Other Animals*, is permeated with religious ideas of resurrection, salvation and judgement. In addition, his company evidently aspired to create a sense of community and the religious festivals of ancient Greece certainly engendered this. The Athenians’ worship of Dionysus necessitated a surrender of “their identity to the god, submerging themselves in him” (McLeish 9). MacColl rejects such a repudiation of individual identity and worship of something outwith the human. Yet Dionysus remains a somewhat subversive (and hence attractive) figure as god of wine and intemperance as well as of theatre. This type of Greek religious festival placed great importance on celebration and community. Peter Arnott suggests that origins of Aristophanic comedy lay in rejoicing over the harvest, during which “the humour of the Greeks was the spontaneous self-expression of a fun-loving people” (26). MacColl wanted his plays to represent this concept; they should be politically challenging, but also committed to spontaneous and heartfelt enjoyment. This focus was later exemplified in Littlewood’s plans for a fun palace during the 1960s and 70s¹¹⁷.

iii “Never depend on devils to act like men; it’s better to depend on men to act like devils”: *The Devil is an Ass and Hell is What You Make It*

Greek theatre marked, according to MacColl, the starting point for any student of theatre history or practitioner of drama. However, his preoccupation with the “theatre of the past” was not restricted to this particular era. He also had a high regard for Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre, particularly the plays of Ben Jonson. Indeed, MacColl and the company juxtaposed Aristophanes and Jonson in the *Manifesto of Theatre Workshop* (1945):

¹¹⁷ For a helpful description of Littlewood’s plans for the fun palace see Holdsworth 32-36.

We want a theatre with a living language, a theatre which is not afraid of the sound of its own voice and which will comment as fearlessly on Society as did Ben Jonson and Aristophanes (42).

In Aristophanes and Jonson, MacColl discovered a type of kinship; both developed an active, exciting theatrical language and a satirical approach that questioned hierarchy and authoritarianism. These were aspects of the theatrical experience that greatly preoccupied MacColl during his time with Theatre Workshop.

His version of Jonson's satirical comedy *The Devil is an Ass* is entitled *Hell is What You Make It*. It was performed by Unity Theatre in 1950 (Chambers, *Unity* 314)¹¹⁸. It is markedly different from MacColl's adaptation of *Lysistrata* as, rather than retain the original's primary characters, events and settings, MacColl creates an entirely new play based very loosely on Jonson's. William Yuill addresses the relationship between an original work and later 'vandalisms' of it in connection with Brecht, arguing that his "adaptations are all, in one way or another, 'Gegenstücke' or 'counterplays': the model is not simply reproduced or emulated but taken as a point of departure or a point of recurrent reference" (8). And the same is certainly true of *Hell is What You Make It*; *The Devil is an Ass* remains a "point of departure", an initial idea or image that MacColl could adapt for his own purposes. Again, according to Margot Heinemann, Brecht "seems from the first to have been deeply fascinated and attracted by [Shakespeare's] plays, even though critical of their 'dead' and outdated aspects and repelled by most of the productions he had seen" (Dollimore and Sinfield eds. 228), and this observation could just as readily apply to MacColl; both playwrights reflected on the potential of the Elizabethan and Jacobean canon but were largely dismissive of standard twentieth-century attitudes to it. MacColl's adaptation of *The Devil is an Ass* is an attempt to

¹¹⁸ Unity Theatre, like Theatre Workshop, began amidst the political upheavals of the 1930s and its intentions were similar; "it pioneered direct political commentary on stage in its satires and documentary-based shows and developed a drama that represented working-class life and speech with insight and integrity" (Chambers 17). There were some links and connections between Unity and Theatre Workshop in addition to presenting *Hell is What You Make It*. For example, in 1952 there were discussions between the two companies about mutual co-operation "but despite good and friendly relations at a personal level between several members of Theatre Workshop and Unity, there was no chance of any more formal contact between the two theatres (332). Unity also produced Theatre Workshop play *You Can't Always Be On Top* and there were many noticeable connections between the members of the two companies (360). However, Chambers suggests that there were perceptible differences. One of the most obvious differences lies in the companies' choices of plays. Both used plays from overseas but for Unity these had "more of a solidarity function than a challenging aesthetic one" (336-7). According to Chambers, Unity did not have the experimentation and innovation of Theatre Workshop.

break away from the established methods of presentation and instead create a new, innovative theatrical work.

Just as MacColl admired the sparseness of the ancient Greek stage with its platforms, lack of fourth wall and focus on the figure of the actor, so he admired the Elizabethan/ Jacobean stage for similar reasons. As Richard Southern puts it, the Elizabethan 'scaffold' is an "open stage" and therefore "placeless", or rather it is every place; such a stage "is a stage. And it does not represent one; it *is* one" (111). Such an architectural development relies, as Meyerhold's twentieth-century Constructivist staging does, on the audience's imagination, on engagement rather than uncritical gratification. And such a platform stage enables a theatre company to focus on the verbal and the physical, so that the actor becomes pre-eminent. As Stephen Orgel declares, "both the Globe and the court theater [of the Tudors and Stuarts] were spectacular, both were highly rhetorical; the visual and the verbal emphases in no way excluded each other" (Orgel 19). As revealed in discussions of plays such as *The Flying Doctor*, with its witty dialogue and Laban-influenced movements, or *The Other Animals*, which combines highly poetic language with dance, MacColl's aesthetic remained heavily preoccupied with both the verbal and the visual, often juxtaposing the two; so that the achievements of Elizabethan/ Jacobean theatre in this area would undoubtedly have appealed to him.

Social issues would be relevant too. Brecht argues that "in the age of learning, in the nineteenth century, the classics were considered to be the intellectual furniture of the well-to-do middle class" (Brecht, *Brecht on Art and Politics* 77): something in marked contrast to the audience demographic of the Elizabethan/Jacobean theatre and of his own— and MacColl's— intended public. Like the theatre of Aristophanes' experience, the Elizabethan/ Jacobean theatre had an element of democracy even if it does have to undergo censoring from the monarch's Master of the Revels. Thomas Dekker writing in 1609 asserts that the theatre auditorium is a welcoming environment for a wide spectrum of individuals:

allowing a stool as well to the farmer's son as to your Templar; that your stinkard has the selfsame liberty to be there in his tobacco-fumes, which your sweet courtier hath; and that your carman and tinker claim as strong a voice in their suffrage, and sit to give judgement on the play's life and death, as well as the proudest Momus among the tribe of critic (Evans 22).

Some historians have cast some doubt on this supposition of total democracy, as individuals could still be classified by where they stood/sat in the auditorium;

however, “within these categories all spectators were equal” (Orgel 8), and it is certainly right to conclude that the Elizabethan/ Jacobean theatre would contain an eclectic variety of people. Within this environment, the plays of the period could attract a broad array of individuals from different spheres of society; as Lee Beier asserts “the diversity of the potential playgoers who happened to be in London at any one time suggests that the playhouses attracted a broad cross-section of the population” (Kinney ed. 195), theatre could engage with contemporary issues and concerns, and directly inform or challenge an audience. During the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, unlike much of the theatre of MacColl’s experience, drama—a metatheatre of declamation on an open stage—“was exposure, it was confrontation, it was contradiction and it led to analysis, involvement, recognition and, eventually, to an awakening of understanding” (Brook 36).

MacColl’s interest in Jonson specifically is perhaps most effectively explained by Stephen Lacey in an essay discussing the connection between Jonson and another twentieth-century politically engaged playwright, John Arden. He argues that, for Arden, the attraction of Jonson was “a case of a maverick being drawn to a maverick” (Woolland 124). Jonson began his working life as a bricklayer, “one of the lowliest and least skilled of Elizabethan crafts” (Barton 1) and this would undoubtedly have appealed to MacColl too. Jonson, then, has been regarded historically as a satirist, a playwright with a powerful mocking voice, which was something MacColl relished in him: “how quickly was Jonson off the mark, eager to dissect the new merchant class at the moment of its birth and, in the process, fashioning brilliant new satires out of old moralities” (Goorney and MacColl, xlvii). Satire is an inherently bourgeois mode and is not generally, and perhaps surprisingly, a challenging, confrontational genre. Indeed, “a paradoxical feature of satire is that it is in one sense subversive of order, it tends to be deeply traditional...satire is a conservative art and the example of Augustan England suggests that it flourishes most in an order-minded culture, perhaps at moments when order is felt to be slipping” (Rawson ed. viii). However, MacColl politicises this movement. Like Aristophanes, Jonson could critique modern society through humour and “it is often through broad comedy that serious issues are explored” (Woolland 131). Comedy became a theatrical weapon. It should of course be remembered that Jonson also had connections with the aristocracy and this does create a certain ambiguity; “despite all the petty irritations and discord that must have marred the relationship, Jonson saw himself in James and found the king’s favor profoundly gratifying” (Marcus 13). In Jonson’s canon, plays that ruthlessly

expose society such as *Volpone* or *Bartholomew Fair* stand alongside poetry of patronage like *To Penshurst*. However, his plays reveal a sharp satirical interpretation of contemporary society, especially in its falling away from Biblical morality and its dominance by that 'new merchant class', and, like MacColl, "playgoing for Jonson is never a simple matter of being entertained" (Woolland 13). MacColl perpetually looked to a playwright whose work consistently revelled in satirical humour, pedagogical objectives and a profound interrogation of actual material existence.

Jonson's preoccupation with urban life would also have intrigued Salford-born MacColl. The image of the urban centre, with plays such as *Landscape with Chimneys* or *The Long Winter*, dominates MacColl's work and, in his search for a literary tradition that could inform his own work, he returns to plays in which the cityspace remains a vital backdrop. Like Aristophanes whose plays encapsulated the contemporary urban experience of Athens, Jonson's plays—in the tradition of Elizabethan city comedy but to much more intense degree—consistently present the image of urban life. *Volpone*¹¹⁹ is based in Venice and, though some of the action is played inside Volpone's house, the urban street still functions as a place in which the characters can interact. There is even allusion to Fleet Street and Smithfield (V.ii), areas of London with which the audience would be familiar. Indeed, one of Jonson's other satirical plays is based in Smithfield. *Bartholomew Fair* imagines the vivacity and ebullience of a London fair. The image of the urban street and the events, incidents and characters that inhabit it remains an important metaphor for the examination of contemporary existence.¹²⁰

*The Devil is an Ass*¹²¹, the specific basis of MacColl's adaptation, is no exception to this rule. The opening conversation between Satan and Pug discusses London in a detailed manner, even mentioning particular places—Tottenham, Kentish Town, Hoxton. Pug's conversation with Iniquity contains similar allusions:

Down Petticoat Lane, and up the Smock Alleys,
To Shoreditch, Whitechapel, and so to Saint Katherine's (1.i).

¹¹⁹ This play in its original form was produced by Theatre Workshop in 1955.

¹²⁰ Indeed, it is interesting to note that both the plays that MacColl chose to adapt are urban plays. *Lysistrata* is based in the city where the seat of government is situated. As previously stated in chapter one, the city is a tremendously important symbol for him, providing an authentic backdrop for his working class characters.

¹²¹ The most likely source for MacColl was the 1935 *Complete Plays of Ben Jonson* edited by Felix Schelling and published by J.M. Dent. This remains speculation.

Robert Evans suggests, "*The Devil is an Ass* is very much a play written in and for a particular historical moment" (94), an inherently urban, metropolis-based moment which captures the essence of the modern, the developing, the rapidly changing. And although MacColl changes the setting of his vandalised version from London to Hell itself, though of course Jonson *begins* his play in Hell, the suggestions of urban and industrial experience remain in his inclusion of the miners and the seat of government initially dominated by Lucifer but later seized by Todt and Baldwin. Just as MacColl's folk influences are almost uniformly urban, he is innately attracted to the urban literary tradition.

Then the central tenets of *The Devil is an Ass* and *Hell is What You Make It* are, in spite of evident differences in character and backdrop, remarkably similar. Both plays suggest that human beings can be worse than devils: that human actions relegate devils in the hierarchy of evil. Jonson's junior devil Pug, scrutinizing the behaviour of his master Fitzdottrel and his companions, concludes that "my days in Hell were holy-days to this" (4.iv). His imploring speech to Satan early in the last act of the play lists a myriad of impossible or unappealing actions that he would prefer to do rather than remain on earth, including "yoking foxes, milking of he-goats,/ Pounding of water in a mortar" (5.ii). MacColl retains this idea in *Hell is What You Make It*. Though he disposes of Pug and makes Lucifer the central devil character, when Todt and Baldwin usurp Lucifer as leader of Hell, Lucifer cries, "The Prince of Darkness! Why compared with Todt and Baldwin I'm a backward student" (66) (Jonson's Pug had compared Hell to a grammar school and Earth to a university (4.iv)). The humans who challenge the devils in both plays are seemingly aware of their own power and expertise. After suggesting violent and repressive means to maintain authority in Hell, Baldwin asserts "I have a kind of presentiment, an intuition, that Lucifer will soon be moving into a smaller office. This one suits me admirably" (40). This reflects Merecraft's suggestion in *The Devil is an Ass* that "'tis no hard thing t'outdo the Devil in:/ A boy o' thirteen made him an ass/ But t'other day" (5.vi). Not only is it easy to outmanoeuvre the Devil, it is also something to be admired and emulated: a view that a large majority of the characters in both plays subscribe to.

Both plays discuss the state of contemporary society and the primary vices of the dominant classes. MacColl and Jonson both maintained a profound fascination with the contemporary everyday and particular movements within current society. Jonathan Dollimore reflects that "Brecht clearly thought of the

Elizabethans as making some sort of intentional critique of their own historical conjecture, as he himself did" (68) and Brecht's position is clearly MacColl's too. If *Lysistrata* satirises the warmongers of the Greek governing class, *The Devil is an Ass* critiques fashionable London society with its focus on money, social hierarchy and self-promotion. Financial greed is evident throughout Jonson's canon, the most striking instance perhaps being the opening scene of *Volpone* (1606) which begins "good morning to the day; and next my gold!/ Open the shrine, that I may see my saint" (1.i). Indeed as Don E. Wayne argues, "the deformities that drive Jonson's characters to seek power and self-aggrandizement in one form or another are ultimately linked to the lust for gold" (Dutton 27). *The Devil is an Ass*, written about a decade after *Volpone*, continues this theme. Merecraft is able to dupe Fitzdottrel with promises of financial gain and, consequentially, social standing, respect and authority. Jonson's age, as MacColl knew, was one of unprecedented economic growth and the development of an organised, highly lucrative system of money-making. L.C. Knights, in a book he read during his time with Theatre Workshop, asserts that "projecting, or the floating of schemes that might be made profitable by means of a monopoly, was a phenomenon of the early seventeenth century" (73). This produced a new set of individuals intent upon economic reward: the "new men", as Knights calls them, who "owed their power not to the possession of land, like the old feudal nobility, nor to political administrative talents, like the newer members of the Tudor aristocracy, but solely to their business ability" (80). MacColl perpetuates this critique of the "new man" in *Hell is What You Make It* in the figures of Baldwin, Armitage and Sir Geoffrey. When Todt and Baldwin supplant Lucifer as leaders of Hell, Baldwin asserts that on earth "if people were poor, we made 'em poorer and called it progress" (37). These characters driven by an appetite for economic gain, having made fortunes, it seems, simply through projecting. Thus though Armitage was a tool manufacturer, he has no expertise in actually wielding the tools he created (6). Sir Geoffrey shares a similar position when he responds to Lucifer's suggestion that the newcomers become taxi drivers, factory workers or cleaners:

Damn it, sir! We're not labourers. Surely our social position entitles us to some consideration (29).

According to Jean Marsden literary appropriation, present to some degree in every act of reading and particularly evident in MacColl's work as he appropriates an entire play and applies it directly to contemporary life, suggests a sense of ownership: associated, she suggests, with "abduction, adoption and theft, appropriation's central tenet is the desire for possession" (1). MacColl's vandalism

of Jonson's play creates a new play, an original dramatic work that, in performance, is possessed by a new audience who create meaning through observation and interaction, and metatheatricality is one of its primary techniques.

The Devil is an Ass is a highly metatheatrical play, beginning with a prologue in which the announcer affirms that "when six times you ha' seen't, / If this play do not like, the devil is in't" (Prologue). This sense of metatheatricality is augmented by the opening act in which Fitzdottrel is going to the theatre to see a play entitled *The Devil is an Ass* (1.iv). Jonson is evidently attempting to challenge the audience that if such a man as Fitzdottrel could have been coming to watch this play then it is likely that there are others in the audience that embody such vices. Through metatheatricality Jonson levels his challenge to his audience and such a device would undoubtedly have attracted MacColl, who uses similar techniques throughout his own work from the direct proclamation of the dangers of science in *Uranium* 235 to the final song, *Which Side Are You On?* in *Landscape with Chimneys*.

Interestingly, *Hell is what You Make it* is one of MacColl's most sustained studies of the upper classes. Generally MacColl focuses on the working-class experience, with images of the upper classes reduced to satirical reflections, as with the allusions to Winston Churchill in *Operation Olive Branch* or the description of the governments of Eisenhower and Johnson in *Festival of Fools*. The only other play in which there is such an in-depth study of the intentions and justifications of the upper classes is the 1947 play *Rogue's Gallery*. Though disappointing to the critics—"Rogue's Gallery is not Theatre Workshop's line of country...naturalistic acting is required. We missed the music, movement and cinematic construction (Goorney 69)—*Rogue's Gallery* marks, along with *Hell is What You Make It*, MacColl's most persistent examination of the upper classes¹²². *Rogue's Gallery*, written just two years after *Hell is What You Make It*, is also Jonsonian in content and style. The first act narrates the difficulties and troubles of a collection of thieves who become acquainted with a group of actors. Between them they decide to rob a wealthy house belonging to the Swingers; the actors join the thieves in order to raise money to pay, interestingly, for a theatre company. Indeed, the actors' intentions are similar to MacColl's own:

¹²² Although *Hell is What You Make It* focuses on characters such as General Todt and Baldwin who, like Captain Slashell and the Golden Knight of *St George and the Dragon*, represent army leaders and businessmen, MacColl's vandalised play also contains a number of characters that depict the values of the aristocracy, namely Lady Ursula and Sir Geoffrey.

Actually, all we want to do is make a theatre which will appeal to a man's mind instead of his endocrine glands (20).

The second half of the play is based in the Swinger's house in which the characters of the first half are employed as servants as a cover for their crime. Through the perspective of the thieves and actors, MacColl critiques the attitudes and self-valorisation of the Swinger family, their obsession with financial gain, their preoccupation with appearances, and their presumptions about the working class.

Both *Hell is What You Make It* and *Rogue's Gallery*, then criticise certain aspects of upper-class experience. In this they bear a marked resemblance to Jonson's seventeenth-century plays, and the parallel images reveal both the general similarities in the playwrights' intentions and in the contemporary situations outwith their respective theatres. For example, money and egotism remain central thematic concerns throughout *The Devil is an Ass*. Fitzdottrel's response to his new cloak touches on these dual themes of economic greed and personal self-promotion: "here is a cloak cost fifty pound, wife,/ Which I can sell for thirty, when I ha' seen/ All London in't, and London has seen me" (1.vi). Such vanity recurs in *Hell is What You Make It*; it is miner MacKenna who describes it most perceptively when he responds to Sir Geoffrey: "the only duty you ken is the duty to yourselves, your only law is the law of the jungle and the only authority you recognise is the siller in your pouches" (76). The concerns of Sir Geoffrey, Lady Ursula, Armitage and the others are perpetually self-centred. Again, these concepts recur in the later *Rogue's Gallery*. Amos insists that money produces a concrete idea of selfhood; without money, an individual is reduced to a bestial state: "without money, man would be just another animal, a tailless ape competing with a chimpanzee for a handful of nuts" (53).

Male/female partnerships are tainted by this avarice and conceit in both Jonson and MacColl. The relationship between Fitzdottrel and his wife in *The Devil is an Ass* is based entirely on financial dealings, extra-marital affairs and deception. In *Hell is What You Make It*, Mrs Liptrot attempts to make a match between Armitage and her daughter Barbara. Barbara's protestation that he is a bore is rebuffed by Mrs Liptrot: "my dear, you must expect that. Your father was just as boring but he made a model husband" (51). She coaxes Barbara: "it might be better if you were to encourage him a little. Don't be indiscreet, just try to strike a middle course" (52). When café owner Mulligan accuses Mrs Liptrot of being a pimp it seems absurd, as she is a respectable, middle-aged lady; but as the play progresses,

the audience begins to concur with Mulligan's conclusion. Male/female relationships are reduced to an economic exchange or a hollow 'patriotic' obligation. Tiberius and Jack the Ripper's attempted rape of Miss Sharpe is dismissed by General Todt: "he said it was my duty to submit and that I should be proud to be of service to the nation" (66). A similar situation occurs in *Rogue's Gallery* when Dianne is willingly prostituted by her father Amos in order to disgrace his associate Holmes. Cruikshank, Amos' son-in-law and partner in this project, rehearses his response to Holmes' inevitable downfall:

I promise you that my performance will be a model for all wronged husbands...I'll stand there, listening, a dignified and broken-hearted man and now and then I'll shake my head sorrowfully but implacably (59).

Marriage, love and affection are debased and reduced to financial exchange, a means of gaining political and economic power. By contrast, Adamson's relationship with his wife in *Hell is What You Make*, just like Johnny's with Mary in *Johnny Noble* or Hugh and Clare's in *Landscape with Chimneys* it, is one of devotion. Whereas MacColl's upper-class characters have only acquaintances and business partners who are ever-willing to promote themselves regardless of the effects on others, his working-class characters assist, support and encourage one another. Adamson joins the striking miners as they meet in Sam Mulligan's café. The café owner distributes his produce for free and when Nashe exclaims "the earth was never like this", Mulligan's reply reflects the differing attitudes of the classes: "ah, I expect you have been mixing with the wrong people" (49). The class-comparison becomes even more acute in *Rogue's Gallery*. Myer, Kate, Chick, Allen and the rest are genuinely concerned about their friends. Myer's anxiety about Chick is revealed in his conversation with Kate: "I'm fond of the lad, and I don't like watching him act crazy" (7). They are characterised by camaraderie and a gentle jocular humour, mostly at the expense of Lazar and his new suit.

It is perhaps here that MacColl's vandalism of Jonson deviates most from the original. MacColl's attitude towards *The Devil is an Ass* reveals Brecht's exhortation, "read in it and read into it", in praxis. Jonson is primarily preoccupied with critiquing the "new men"; MacColl, by contrast, is more concerned with class relations and the possibility for socio-political change. In MacColl's plays, lower-class characters are involved in warm, mutually supportive friendships (Jessie Love, Nashe and Adamson in *Hell is What You Make It*, the thieves in *Rogue's Gallery*) and romantic relationships and (Adamson and his wife in *Hell is What You Make It*), Jonson's characters remain individualised, connections between them largely

defined by economics and self-gain. This, however, is not to suggest that Jonson entirely disregarded class interaction; indeed, one of the most striking and complex relationships in his comedy is between Fitzdottrel, the “new man”, and his servant/devil, Pug. Fitzdottrel pays Pug “four pound by the year”, which he refers to as “thrift” (1.iv) but may be more accurately described as exploitation. Fitzdottrel’s treatment of Pug ranges from admiring him as a “good devil” (1.vii) when expedient to do so and beating him as a “manifest rogue” (2.iii) when he is displeased. But unlike Pug, who merely despairs of Fitzdottrel and his companions, the lower-class (working-class) figures of MacColl’s plays discuss industrial action and the possibility of revolutionary change in a world where the working class is repressed. Just as the governing leaders in *Lysistrata* and, in turn, *Operation Olive Branch* challenge the promotion of un-Athenian ideas, Mr Vulcan of the emergency cabinet in *Hell is What You Make It* decides to “cleanse the nation of all un-Hellish influences” (41) and crush the miners’ strike as a patriotic measure. However, the working class commit themselves to improving the society of Hell. The image of Heaven is transformed by MacColl from a place ready-created by a higher being to a community established and constructed by its occupants; as Adamson suggests “Paradise belongs to the people of Paradise. They made it, fought for it” (86). If Adamson’s suppositions are correct, then social revolution remains a possibility for the inhabitants of Hell. In a speech reminiscent of Hanau’s imagery in *The Other Animals* Adamson concludes the play with the declaration, “I couldn’t sleep now. Look the sun’s coming up. It’s almost morning”(93). Todt and Baldwin are confined to a lunatic asylum, like Graubard in *The Other Animals*, and the final scene is one of hope and expectation. Everybody, said Brecht, talking of playscript adaptation, “spoke of barbarism if the classics weren’t performed as they imagined they should be. Everybody was outraged when lines were cut which they did not even know” (Brecht, *Brecht on Art and Politics* 78). Rather than a barbarism to be countered, MacColl’s play practices a vandalism that redefines and reinvigorates Jonson’s original, creating a new, highly innovative and, indeed, extraordinarily challenging play.

iv What about Shakespeare?

MacColl’s admiration for Jonson, his plays, his critical spirit and his satiric approach are evident. MacColl regarded the plays of this period of theatrical history as valuable resources for the construction of twentieth-century plays. Just as every act of reading can be viewed as “making sense of a literary artefact by fitting it into

our own parameters" (Marsden ed. 1), *Hell is What You Make It* takes Jonson's work and transforms it into a critique of twentieth-century actuality through an act of literary vandalism. An absence remains, however; MacColl utilised the Jonsonian model on a number of occasions and cited Jonson as a key influence upon his work, but Shakespeare is rarely mentioned. Firstly the company devised a version of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for a schools tour (Goorney 78). Furthermore, during the 'fifties Theatre Workshop produced a number of Shakespeare plays; *Twelfth Night*, *Richard II* and *Macbeth* all became part of the company's repertoire during this period. Littlewood's version of *Macbeth*, while not explicitly changing text, narrative or character as MacColl did in his vandalism plays, certainly reflected the notion of vandalism so discernible in MacColl's treatment of *Lysistrata* and *The Devil is an Ass*, situating the play in the 1930s and presenting Macbeth as "Franco, an army general who became a dictator" (Leach, *Theatre Workshop* 113). During the September to the November of 1952, the company toured the Glasgow schools with a version of *Henry IV* (MacKenney 23). Littlewood maintained that her general aesthetic paralleled the ideas, audience demography and acting style of the Shakespearian stage:

Shakespeare's company was made up of leary misfits, anarchists, out of work soldiers and wits who worked their ideas in pubs and performed them as throwaways to an uninhibited pre-Puritan audience (Goorney 130).

So why wasn't MacColl equally wedded to Shakespeare? He readily admits to a limited Shakespearian knowledge, stating that he "was to reach the age of twenty-four before I was to plunge into the great sea of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama"¹²³, and that before that juncture he had read only *Macbeth* and *Troilus and Cressida* (Goorney and MacColl xvii). However, MacColl's plays seemingly reflect many aspects of the Shakespearian theatre, most obviously the conventions of metatheatre. Lionel Abel, discussed more fully in chapter one, bases his suppositions on Shakespeare's plays. He analyses *Hamlet* in metatheatrical terms, as "life seen as already theatricalized" (60). He continues his argument with a close analysis of twentieth-century playwrights such as Brecht and Beckett; and MacColl could also be placed within this tradition. His plays, as we have seen, are almost always infused with elements of the metatheatrical, whether the declamation of *Last*

¹²³ There is the suggestion in the television documentary about MacColl's life, *Rhythms of the World*, that after seeing a performance of *Uranium 235*, Sean O'Casey declared that "Marlowe is in the wings". Christopher Marlowe is, of course, another great Elizabethan playwright who may have had some influence upon MacColl's aesthetic. Marlowe certainly provided some inspiration for the company who mentioned him alongside Shakespeare in the *Manifesto of Theatre Union* (Goorney 25). Later the company produced a version of Marlowe's *Edward II*.

Edition, the direct address to the audience of *Landscape with Chimneys* or the play within a play of *Rogue's Gallery*. This latter episode is particularly interesting in this context. Plays such as Shakespeare's *Tempest* or *Midsummer Night's Dream* contain plays within the play. Abel suggests that "almost every important character acts at some moment like a playwright, employing a playwright's consciousness of drama to impose a certain posture or attitude on another" (46). And this is certainly the case in *Rogue's Gallery* also. Allan decides to construct a play based upon the Swingers. The group of actors (the actors playing actors) perform the different Swinger characters, from the self-absorbed Dianne to Amos and his business dealings, to Mrs Swinger and her disdain for the servants. Laurie's speech reveals the intentions of the episode:

The show is just about to commence. Walk up! Walk up and see the greatest show on earth!...There he [Swinger] sits, ladies and gentlemen, ready to show you his amazing talents. He looks like a man and yet he is not a man...He is the proud possessor of a magic formula by which he can change men into beasts of burden (95-6).

MacColl introduces obvious markers into his play within the play: the characters are given their roles before the audience, and Laurie's speech sets this episode apart from the rest of the narrative.

In addition to a profound sense of the metatheatrical, language arguably marks the primary connection between Shakespeare and MacColl. As asserted with particular reference to *The Other Animals*, MacColl's theatre is often characterised by linguistic experiment and a search for a method of phraseology that would create poetry for the working class while at the same time concretising a semblance of working-class speech. He recognised and admired Shakespeare as a playwright of language: "hadn't Shakespeare teased and manipulated language till it fitted the hands like magic gloves?" (Gorney and MacColl xlvii). Terry Eagleton has noted that Shakespeare's plays consistently reflect language's "power to bend the world to its own will" (8), suggesting that language is a mode of authority, control and political activity. The world, mediated through linguistic media, is necessarily perceived, understood and indeed constructed through language. To have control over language is to have control over the socio-political state. MacColl's exploitation of language is actively concerned to claim a sense of power and independence for a working class oppressed by the hegemonic language of the ruling classes, and it could be argued that this is something he derives from Shakespeare.

There are arguably Shakespearian influences within MacColl's work then; yet he adapts *The Devil is an Ass* rather than a play by Shakespeare. The central reason for this surely lies in the fundamental difference between the canons of Jonson and Shakespeare. Shakespeare's plays often have an element of fortune or Providence. *Romeo and Juliet* are "star-crossed"; *Julius Caesar*, in conversation with Brutus, blames events on fate and the stars; even *Henry V*, in a play based on the material realities of war, cites "giddy Fortune's furious fickle wheel". And he further sets only one of his plays in something like a contemporary urban world: *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Jonson's scenarios in his several city comedies, by contrast, are more grounded in material actuality, in money, economics and recognisable urban life. There is also a perceptible difference in the playwrights' attitudes towards the characters portrayed; as Russ McDonald has noted, "Shakespeare observes and smiles at humanity and its ways; Jonson mocks and fulminates" (12). It is Jonson's derision of modern society that attracts MacColl. Shakespeare adapted narratives from his contemporaries in Britain and overseas while "Jonson's suspicion of narrative for its own sake is accompanied by a commitment to and a gift for satiric portraiture" (McDonald 10-11). Although this is purely speculation, it is perhaps this difference between the materialist, satirical work of Jonson and the observational, fate-driven plays of Shakespeare that leads MacColl to vandalise the former rather than the latter. It has been left to other playwrights to adapt Shakespeare's plays: Brecht produced a version of *Coriolanus* (the unfinished adaptation was published in 1959 in *Stücke XI* (Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre* 265)) while Bond later adapted *King Lear* (1971).

An established literary tradition remains a vital influence on MacColl's aesthetic. Rather than reject ancient Greek and Elizabethan/Jacobean theatre based solely on his experience of the productions of the plays in contemporary theatres, he reappropriates well-known plays for a new audience and a new objective. In the epilogue to *Agit-Prop to Theatre Workshop* he concludes that "the plays inherited from the great theatres of the past, the Greeks the Elizabethans, the *Commedia dell'arte* and the Spanish theatre of Lope de Vega, are the heritage of all people and must not remain, as at present, the privilege of the few. These playwrights wrote for a popular theatre of their own time and many of their themes are still relevant today" (204). The classics of 'literary' drama remain pertinent for a modern audience in spite of what he saw as the degradation of such works by the established theatre, as, in Brecht's words, "they plundered the contents of the classics and wore

them out. There was no tradition, just consumption” (Brecht, *Brecht on Art and Politics* 78), so that theatre became a consumer’s forum, a privilege of those who could afford to be entertained and wanted uncritical pleasure rather than challenge. However, the literary tradition remained potentially revolutionary, exciting and unconventional in spite of years of what Brecht and MacColl saw as unsatisfactory and substandard productions. It is this conviction that prompts MacColl to vandalise Aristophanes and Jonson and, by desecrating the theatre of the past, allows him to create a theatre of the present. Brecht, in his exposition of *Hamlet* in *A Short Organum for the Theatre*, suggests that he “can read the story thus” in response to the contemporary situation and that “this way of reading the play [as situated in an “age of warriors” and negotiating the diametrical opposition between reason and irrationality]...might in my view interest our audience” (Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre* 202). In response to his political convictions, the threat of war and the perceived class struggle, MacColl aims to provide a similar “interest”.

CHAPTER FIVE CONCLUSION

“POLITICS WAS THE BINDING FORCE, THE CEMENT THAT HELD EVERYTHING TOGETHER, BUT THEATRE— FOR THE NEXT TWENTY YEARS— WAS TO BE THE MEDIUM”: THE LEGACY OF EWAN MACCOLL.

A number of critics and theatre practitioners have written books discussing Theatre Workshop and its legacy; the most recent of these is Robert Leach's *Theatre Workshop: Joan Littlewood and the Making of Modern British Theatre* (2006). There are also several books that discuss Littlewood and her objectives and successes, including her autobiography (reprinted in 2003) and Nadine Holdsworth's *Joan Littlewood* for the Routledge Performance Practitioners series (2006). Littlewood has generally been regarded, quite rightly, as a primary influence on British theatre in the later twentieth century. Her innovative ideas and the production of the highly regarded *Oh What a Lovely War* have concretised her legacy as one of the foremost inspirations for a number of playwrights, directors and theatre technicians. Albert Hunt, community theatre worker in Bradford during the 1970s and '80s, reflects that "without her none of it [his own innovative work in Bradford] could have been imaginable" (Hunt, *Changing Forces* 492-3)¹²⁴. In a declaration that could have been made by Littlewood herself he asserts that "the first positive step towards any theatre-in-education programme is to re-identify theatre with play, and play with learning" (Hunt, *Hopes* 123). The interrelation of learning and play, pedagogy and pleasure was the key to Littlewood's development of exercises and games (Holdsworth 132-133) and Hunt's extensions of it. Littlewood had a similar impact upon the work of Peter Cheeseman at the Victoria Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent: his first "musical documentary" was heavily influenced by *Oh What a Lovely War* (Elvgren 90). In addition, Howard Goorney includes a number of comments in *The Theatre Workshop Story* from practitioners who considered Littlewood to be one of the major forces in recent British theatrical history. He cites Peter Hall¹²⁵: "I owe Joan a lot...as an inspirer, someone I admire, whose theatre I went to a lot" (182). Harold Hobson¹²⁶ concludes likewise: "Joan broke up the fabric of British theatre" (183). John McGrath reaches a similar verdict:

¹²⁴ Quoted in Holdsworth, 75.

¹²⁵ Sir Peter Hall was a theatre director who developed strong links with the Theatre Workshop company. Alongside, amongst others, Kenneth Tynan and the Earl of Harewood, Hall was a sponsor for a fund set up to support Theatre Workshop after difficulties with the Lord Chamberlain following a performance of *You Won't Always Be On Top* (1956) (Goorney 106).

¹²⁶ Harold Hobson was a theatre critic who generally admired Theatre Workshop's productions and Littlewood's theatrical aesthetic. After seeing *The Hostage* (1958), Hobson "considered it

Oh What a Lovely War had an extraordinary effect on British theatre. In the 1960s it was performed and loved in almost every repertory in the country...the fame of Theatre Workshop spread, and with it a whole set of attitudes to making theatre (McGrath, *Naked Thoughts* 32).

Celebrating her as a modernising and creative force in British theatre, John Ezard and Michael Billington wrote in their 2002 *Guardian* obituary, "she has long been acknowledged...as the most galvanising director in mid-20th century Britain" (*Guardian* Sept 23rd 2002)¹²⁷.

By contrast, MacColl's contribution to the Theatre Workshop aesthetic has been largely overlooked, and his plays have languished for fifty years and more unread and unperformed in library archives. These questions remain: what is the legacy of MacColl's work? What were his successes? What is the importance of his plays and what role could they have in today's theatre? In his autobiography, *Journeyman*, MacColl attempts to evaluate the impact of the Theatre Workshop as it was in the 1940s and 50s. In spite of an evident sense of achievement, the following analysis is permeated with disappointment and a sense of unfulfilled hopes:

All of us who worked in Theatre Workshop in those early days benefited from the experience in one way or another. We did not, however, make any lasting impression on the English theatre as a whole. For a short time I believed we had, but twenty years of theatre-going has since disabused me of any such notion. With few exceptions, the acting is just as mediocre as it ever was, the production just as puerile—gimmicky, pretentious and puerile. Other nations have produced a theatre of cruelty, a theatre of the absurd. We have produced a theatre of dullness. And what is more, we are proud of our dullness (267).

MacColl concludes that Theatre Workshop as he conceived it has very little impact on British theatre which on the face of it seems strange, given the reputation of Littlewood. By association, MacColl would presumably have concluded that his own plays similarly had made very little tangible difference to the British stage. And this remains an incontestable fact. With few exceptions, MacColl's plays *have* been largely neglected and ignored.

to be the best musical running in London, and as it was competing with *My Fair Lady* and *West Side Story* that was praise indeed" (Goorney 116).

¹²⁷ www.arts.guardian.co.uk/news/story/079712400.html

This is not to say that they weren't often highly regarded when first presented on the Theatre Workshop stage. Linda MacKenney, during her time with 7:84, spoke to many who remembered MacColl's plays:

Loading the van after a night on a housing estate on a windswept hilltop outside Greenock: "We used to watch the Ewan McColl [sic] plays in the old days- do you know [sic] them? You should be doing them." OK, Uranium 235 was famous and published, but what about Ewan's other plays? (Xiii).

John McGrath recollects similar conversations: "in Scotland people still come up to me after 7:84 Scotland shows and talk with clear and fond memories of 'the Ewan MacColl' shows during the late forties. I am told they were *very* well attended, and I imagine there were very few Rolls-Royces outside the door" (McGrath, *Good Night Out* 47). Indeed, Theatre Workshop actor Jack Pulman concludes that "the only style that was ever unique about Theatre Workshop was given to it by Ewan's writing" (Goorney 89). Certainly this is an overstatement, ignoring as it does Littlewood's innovative use of theatrical experimentation, the considerable impact of *Oh What a Lovely War* and her productions of many controversial and groundbreaking plays, including Brecht's *Mother Courage and her Children* (1955) and Behan's *The Quare Fellow* (1956) and *The Hostage* (1958). However, Pulman's assertion does reveal the importance of MacColl's plays for the Theatre Workshop company and for the development of its aesthetic that was later so lauded and admired. And if his plays received audience acclaim in Britain during the tours, they were seemingly even more popular in Europe. Theatre Workshop embarked upon a number of overseas trips during the 1940s, giving performances in Germany, Czechoslovakia and Sweden. Leach suggests that in Theatre Workshop's style of drama, and indeed in the plays of MacColl, the European audiences saw a reflection of its own theatre: Theatre Workshop was "well received in both these countries, their work was compared to that of Reinhardt, Piscator, Jooss, and MacColl's plays were likened to Toller's" (Leach, *Theatre Workshop* 53). And this is perhaps the primary reason why Theatre Workshop's performances *were* so successful on the Continent: they were similar to the performances of the European tradition and audiences could recognise this. During the tour of Czechoslovakia, Littlewood recalls, "we played *Johnnie Noble*, our story of a Hull fisherman, his life in unemployment, and war. The audience lapped it up, they loved the songs. We had a wildly enthusiastic reception" (Littlewood, *Joan's Book* 346).

MacColl's long-term achievement is difficult to gauge. There remains a substantial collection of myths surrounding him, his character and his work, and this makes evaluation a far more complex process. One of the most persistent is a quotation that is cited in the television programme *Rhythms of the World: The Ballad of Ewan MacColl*, in *Parsley, Sage and Politics* and in a *Green Left Weekly* article entitled 'From Theatre to Folk Club' by Al MacCall, to the effect that George Bernard Shaw, after becoming acquainted with MacColl's work, asserted that "apart from myself MacColl is the only man of genius writing in England today". However there is little concrete evidence for this though it makes an entertaining remark. But researchers and theatre practitioners who have read or performed MacColl's plays generally concur that they have been unfairly overlooked. Robert Leach concludes:

perhaps if more attention had been paid to Ewan MacColl's plays before 1956, the amazement of the plays of Bertolt Brecht would not have been so great. MacColl is not Brecht, though perhaps for British theatregoers he was a kind of Marlowe to Brecht's Shakespeare, for his plays have an epic quality not dissimilar to Brecht's...Ewan MacColl's is virtually the only drama in English that puts twentieth-century British working-class's experience at its centre (Leach, *Theatre Workshop* 77).

Perhaps the most insightful appraisals of MacColl's work lie in a collection of press cuttings from 7:84's revival of *Johnny Noble*. Performed in 1982, a full thirty-seven years after its premiere, during the company's 'Clydebuilt' season¹²⁸, *Johnny Noble* was, as it was when first performed, extremely well received. Directed by the actor who originally played the role of Johnny in Theatre Workshop's production, David Scase, 7:84's version caused theatre critics to reappraise MacColl's original play. The reviews were uniformly positive and reflect its persistent effectiveness. *The Guardian* noted that "*Johnny Noble* comes across as fresh and as potent as though written yesterday" (10th April 1982).

¹²⁸ The Clydebuilt Season of 1982 marked an attempt to resurrect four long-forgotten plays of Scottish theatrical history: Ena Lamont Stewart's *Men Should Weep*, Joe Corrie's *In Time Of Strife*, George Munro's *Gold in his Boots* and MacColl's *Johnny Noble*. Evidently placing MacColl's work within this canon of Scottish politically-engaged theatre is, as previously stated in this thesis, problematic as the playwright resided in England. However his strong familial and cultural links with Scotland does arguably place him within this canon. The aim of the Clydebuilt Season was to reappraise these plays and present them to an eighties audience. As John McGrath states "these pieces have been ignored; they've been cut out of theatrical history—it seemed to me that this was completely wrong, that this is the way the working class loses its history, its self-awareness; it loses, if you like, a cultural richness" (McGrath, *Naked Thoughts*, 135). The Clydebuilt Season brought these plays back into the public domain.

Evidently the play had lost none of its vibrancy and dynamism, and appealed as much to a contemporary audience as to the inhabitants of South Wales nearly forty years previously. In addition, many critics noted the importance of the play in British theatrical history. The correspondent from *The News Line* wrote that “it is an important and worthwhile revival, which throws light on the concealed history of political theatre in Britain” (16th April 1982) while *The West End Times* reflected that “‘Johnny Noble’ was and is a landmark in post-war popular theatre” (12th April 1982). Perhaps most importantly critics also observed the perceptible connection between MacColl’s play and the later work of companies such as 7:84:

‘Johnny Noble’ is a vitally important play in terms of theatrical style, a direct forerunner of the kind of flexible challenging political cabaret with which 7:84 Scotland made its own name in the 1970s (*The Sunday Standard* 11th April 1982).

The contribution of MacColl to this specific genealogy of theatrical development in the British Isles has been largely ignored by researchers and critics. As previously mentioned in connection with Brecht, British theatre history research generally regards 1956 as an *annus mirabilis*, not only because it marked the perceived discovery of Brecht’s work in Britain (though, as we have seen, Theatre Workshop were actually aware of Brecht’s work much earlier than this), but also because of productions such as John Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger*. John McGrath for instance says that “there is a whole generation of playwrights who began their writing careers at the Royal Court between 1956 and 1966, who have gone on to create what is in fact the current dominant mode of theatre, and who are said to have allowed the voice of working class into the British theatre for the first time since Shakespeare, or even the mystery plays” (McGrath, *A Good Night Out* 7). Ewan MacColl’s work evidently challenges such assumptions.

If MacColl’s work questions the prevailing idea that John Osborne *et al.* transformed the nature of British theatre from an artistic form that situated upper-class occupants in drawing rooms and cocktail parties to an examination of a general malaise within society and the presentation of actual material conditions, then surely it also questions the history of radical theatre in Britain as it is normally read. The theatre of British Modernism remained generally in sharp contrast to the innovations of the Continental avant-garde and American Modernism, as we have seen. Whereas the Russians were transforming the appearance of the stage and examining the centrality of the actor, while the Germans were creating highly inter-

artistic plays of formal experimentation and the Americans were confronting contemporary society through the Living Newspaper, British theatre was primarily content to continue largely unchanged. Though there were a number of exceptions to this rule (the Vorticists, to some extent Unity Theatre, Sean O'Casey in Ireland), much mainstream British theatre remained highly conservative in both form and content; this may be true enough, except that it is to disregard MacColl and Theatre Workshop. Andrew Davies suggests that "the history and development of Theatre Workshop indicates what an alternative theatre might look like: irreverent, sprawling, collective, improvisatory, spontaneous, topical—all that the West End usually was not" (Davies, *Other Theatres* 157). Davies' list of attributes could be applied to Meyerhold's Constructivist staging of *The Magnanimous Cuckold* or to *One Third of a Nation* by Federal Theatre in America. To use such terms to describe an indigenous, British theatre of this period is extremely unusual. MacColl's plays were a vital aspect of this innovative theatrical method.

There are a number of playwrights, directors and dramaturges who have continued this tradition of radical politically engaged theatre in Britain and whose work reveal the impact of Theatre Workshop (and specifically methods created by MacColl and Littlewood in collaboration) and uncover the potential of documentary realism for a new audience. For example, Peter Cheeseman's *Fight for Shelton Bar* (1974) used Appia-esque lighting effects and sound recordings to create an image of a factory. In response to the threat of unemployment the workers unite, as "sometime the working people in this country...will have to make a stand" (6). Theatrical experiment, direct declamation and political challenge unite as they did in MacColl's *Johnny Noble* and *Uranium* 235. Indeed, this play ends with a song: "we may be quiet and peaceful folk,/ But we know wrong from right,/ Turn round and tell them face to face/ That you have joined the fight" (49). It is a challenge to the audience through music, a convention utilised to powerful effect in *Landscape with Chimneys*. A similar documentary style was employed in *The Knotty* (1966), which combined declamation, recognisable dialogue and music together in a style similar to that employed by MacColl, Seeger and Parker in the Radio Ballads. Perhaps under the influence of *The Ballad of John Axon*, *The Knotty* examines the history of the railway in Stoke as the former looked to the development of train travel in Stockport and the surrounding area (Cheeseman even acknowledges Charles Parker, suggesting that *The Knotty* had some foundations in the Radio Ballads and therefore in MacColl's theatrical aesthetic more generally). Again, the plays of Albert Hunt's community theatre project also resembled many of

MacColl's own dramatic works. When constructing *John Ford's Cuban Missile Crisis* with the students of Bradford Art College, Hunt cites the influence of Littlewood (13), but the play is also remarkably reminiscent of MacColl's *Uranium* 235, examining the threat of nuclear science through episodic, comedic scenes.

John McGrath's work with 7:84 also often exhibits conventions readily perceptible in MacColl's plays of the 1940s and '50s. For example, *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil* (1974) combined music, declamation and direct political challenge to create a play that confronted hegemonic views of Scottish history and encouraged the working class audience to unite against the prominent powers of capitalism. Music was equally central to his *Little Red Hen*, which even contained the "first verse of Ewan MacColl's song" (42):

He's gone frae the shipyard that stands on the Clyde
His hammer is silent, his tools laid aside;
To the wide Ebro River, young Foyers has gone
To fecht by the side of the people of Spain (42).

This song reflects the influence of MacColl's idea of musical theatre upon a new generation of playwrights, but also illustrates the perpetuation of specific images in left-wing politically engaged theatre: industry, class solidarity and the Spanish Civil War. Furthermore, in McGrath's *Random Happening in the Hebrides* (1972), Jimmy asserts that "*this* is where socialism has to start, here, where the people live and work" (17). This is noticeably similar to the conclusions of Adamson and the miners in *Hell is What You Make It*, who decide that a free society, a Heaven, can be made from the Hell in which they currently reside. McGrath like MacColl points towards the potential for revolutionary change.

There are a number of other theatre companies and playwrights that took MacColl's mantle during the 1960s, '70s and '80s. Arnold Wesker set up Centre Forty Two in 1960¹²⁹ which sought to bring arts to the working class. He is also a dramatist of note. Like MacColl's, his plays examine the Spanish Civil War, the state of slum housing in the inner city (*Chicken Soup with Barley* 1958), and the need to challenge hegemony; in *Roots* (1959) Bessie asserts that "there are millions of us, all over the country, and no one, not one of us, is asking questions, we're all taking the easy way out" (149). Further, companies such as Welfare State, founded

¹²⁹ Wesker did meet MacColl and Seeger at this time when they sang at a festival he had organised (Email 4/9/06).

in 1968, experimented with theatrical methods in order, like MacColl, to confront the everyday:

Welfare State tackle these problems head-on by creating new myths, new hybrid styles, and new celebrations on the matrix of the old, rather than simply reviving the old for its quaint or archane qualities (Coult and Kershaw 1).

The similarities here with MacColl's textual vandalism in plays such as *Hell is What You Make It* and *Operation Olive Branch* are marked. The feminist group Monstrous Regiment (founded 1970), CAST (also working in the 1970s) who "allied themselves with the Socialist Workers Party, who are sort of Trotskyist, fully ultra-leftist party" (interview with Bill McDonnell)¹³⁰ and Joint Stock (founded in 1974 and continuing today as Out of Joint Theatre Company) all reveal the continuation of experimental radical leftist theatre into the later years of the twentieth century. Whether these companies were directly influenced by MacColl's work or not, they all tap into a tradition of innovative workers theatre that attempts to create a workable and consistently challenging engaged realism. MacColl's stage work is integral to this tradition, a connecting tie between playwrights, theatre companies and directors who sought (and are seeking) to use theatre as a weapon.

¹³⁰ Theatre Archive Project www.bl.uk/projects/theatrearchive/mcdonnell.html

APPENDIX ONE

LIST OF PLAYS WITH PLOT SKETCHES

John Bullion (produced at the Round House in Ancoats, Manchester in 1934)

This play was written by MacColl (then Jimmie Miller) and Littlewood early in their theatrical careers. The initial idea came from a Workers' Theatre Movement play called *Hammer*. MacColl refers to *John Bullion* as a play with a "ménage-à-trois of styles borrowed from agit-prop, constructivism and expressionism" (Goorney and MacColl xxxv). It contains a number of symbolically representative characters with names to match (Birthright, Deafen'em, Winmore, Fortune) who are finally defeated by the workers, who march on stage singing the *Internationale*. This play is the first example of MacColl and Littlewood's experimental aesthetic. Although their style matured as they studied and practiced theatre, the conventions they employ in *John Bullion* remain prominent throughout MacColl's canon and Theatre Workshop's performances.

Last Edition (performed at the Round House in Ancoats, Manchester in 1940)

This is written in the Living Newspaper form: a method of presenting relevant information on the stage in the form of an audio-visual newspaper. Goorney cites *Last Edition* as an amalgamation of all the styles Littlewood and MacColl had been studying: "fantasy, satire, agit-prop, music hall, folk song and dance" (22). It discusses the events of the period 1934-1940 and contains references to unemployment and the Means Test, poverty and the Hunger Marches, the Gresford Pit Disaster, the Spanish Civil War and the Munich Pact (presented in the conventions of the gangster film). *Last Edition* was so contentious that MacColl and Littlewood were arrested for breaching the peace, fined and bound over for two years.

The Good Soldier Schweik (First written and performed at the Lesser Free Trade, Manchester in 1938 but produced again by Littlewood in 1953)

Based on Hašek's novel of the same name and inspired by Piscator's adaptation and staging, MacColl's *Schweik* is faithful to Hašek's original. For all the humour he concludes Hašek's story with Schweik and his comrades dying at the front. Like

many of his later plays, *Schweik* reflects upon the war from the soldier's perspective.

Johnny Noble (performed alongside *The Flying Doctor* in Kendal in 1945 and later toured in Sweden, Czechoslovakia and West Germany)

Johnny is a fisherman and in love with Mary. After the death of Mary's father at sea, her mother decides that her daughter should not marry a fisherman. Johnny resolves to find a new job. This search takes him around the country and he speaks with both miners and dockers. It seems that unemployment and poverty are universal, and Johnny eventually decides to return to the sea to help in the Spanish Civil War. When he gets back to his hometown, Mary is delighted to see him, but it isn't long before he is travelling once more; Johnny is conscripted and sent away to fight in the Second World War. When he returns he decides finally to settle down and enjoy his life with Mary. However, a voice from the audience (belonging to a soldier killed in the war) reminds him of his responsibility to "take the world in your hands and wipe it clean". Johnny in turn encourages the audience members to carry this message to the world outwith the theatre. This play is MacColl's most successful juxtaposition of dialogue and folk song.

The Flying Doctor (performed alongside *Johnny Noble* in Kendal in 1945 and later toured in Sweden, Czechoslovakia and West Germany)

This play is based on Molière's play of the same name (*Le Médecin Volant*), but the playwright suggests that it owes as much to *commedia dell'arte* and the Marx Brothers as it did to Molière. It follows the same pattern as the original. Valere is in love with Lucille but she is to be married to the older Villebrequin. Valere and his friend Sabine construct a plan in which the former's servant, Sganarelle, dresses up as a doctor and visits Lucille and her father Gorgibus. The 'doctor' is to prescribe rest at the summerhouse for Lucille, so that Valere can visit her as often as he wants. Sganarelle is really the central character of the piece. Linguistically and physically dextrous, he successfully hoodwinks Gorgibus and his lawyer. The plot thickens when Sganarelle is forced to play two characters, the doctor and his estranged brother. He has to jump out of windows and change costume rapidly in order to maintain the pretence. Finally he is found out, but all ends well as Valere and Lucille are allowed to marry and Sganarelle manages to gain a substantial amount of money. In the character of Sganarelle, MacColl discovered a lower class

figure who could manipulate the other socially superior characters. This, coupled with the exciting potential for linguistic experiment and the development of movement techniques, attracted MacColl to this play.

Uranium 235 (first performed in 1946 at the Newcastle People's Theatre but after revision given in a two-hour version that first played in Blackburn and at Butlin's, Filey later in the same year. It was subsequently presented at Embassy Theatre in Swiss Cottage in 1952)

After the bombing of Hiroshima, MacColl embarked upon a crash course in nuclear physics and wrote his play *Uranium 235*. It takes in the history of atomic theory and practice from the early experiments of Democritus to the conclusions of Mancunian John Dalton and the use of nuclear weapons in the Second World War. The play is written in episodes and is highly metatheatrical, with costume changes and script development discussed as part of the performance, intervals announced from the stage and direct declamation to the audience. It juxtaposes historical scenes, such as that in the Manchester Lit and Phil Society, with music hall, variety show and Expressionistic dance. The second half of the play is dominated by a Puppet Master who auditions potential characters for his show, including Einstein, Nils Bohr and the Curies. This concludes with an innovative depiction of the chemical processes that occur during their experiments; firstly the splitting of the atom is explained through a 1920s gangster scene and then is presented through a dance sequence involving protons, neutrons and elections. In the published version there are two endings; the first explains the need to use science positively rather than to make bombs. The second is bleaker; written later (1952) it suggests that such scientific 'advancement' will inevitably be used to destroy rather than to improve.

Operation Olive Branch (produced by Littlewood in 1947 at the Library Theatre, Manchester)

Another of MacColl's adapted plays, this is based on Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, a play that Theatre Workshop had produced in its original form (though in English translation) before the Second World War. The 1947 reworking "freely adapted from the *Lysistrata* of Aristophanes" follows the story of the original: Lysistrata calls together a group of women whose husbands fight with and against one another in war. She explains that in order to end the war, the women must not have sex with

their husbands since this will eventually force the men to declare peace. In the original and in MacColl's adapted play, the women's actions eventually have the desired effect and the war ends. However, MacColl makes some noticeable changes; he introduces a group of soldiers and updates the play in order to make a comment on the contemporary world, thus enabling him to confront issues such as national identity (using dialect), class unity and the plight of fighting men.

Rogue's Gallery (written in 1947 and performed at the Library Theatre, Manchester in 1949)

The influence of Ben Jonson is perceptible throughout the canon and *Rogue's Gallery*, like many of Jonson's city comedies, is a satirical critique of the merchant class. The play introduces the audience to a gang of thieves (Lazar, Chick, Myer and Kate) who are planning to rob some diamonds from the house of the Swingers (who are morally corrupt, focusing solely on financial gain and social prestige) by pretending to be servants. However, the thieves need additional personnel if they are to succeed. They come into contact with a collection of actors who want enough money to set up a theatre company. The thieves and the actors join forces in the robbery. The Second Act opens in the kitchen of the Swinger house. Each member of the gang (including the co-opted actors) has a different servant job. As the play progresses the audience sees the behaviour of the Swingers and their associates through the eyes of the 'servants'. Mrs Swinger is a greedy hypocrite who regards servants as generally lazy and dishonest; Mr Swinger is an amoral businessman whose sole concern is making more money, and their daughter is sexually predatory. The 'servants' become progressively more disgusted by the behaviour of their employers and decide to finish the job as quickly as possible; but on inspecting the stolen diamonds further they realise that they are fake. After presenting a short skit (with the actors particularly prominent) about the Swingers, they are discovered by Mr and Mrs Swinger, and leave the house singing *Let my People go*.

The Other Animals (first performed at the Library Theatre, Manchester in 1948 and at the Edinburgh International Festival in 1949)

This is the playwright's most experimental piece. Taking the conventions of Expressionism, MacColl constructs a play that explores the themes of political dissidence and hegemonic control. Robert Hanau is held captive in prison after defying the authorities. Violent torture and mental manipulation by Doctor

Graubard have left him scarred physically and psychologically. He is held in a cage which, through the employment of innovative methods of lighting, becomes a character in itself. Two characters play the protagonist; Hanau remains incarcerated in the cage while Robert, his “divided self” (147), is free to wander the world in search of truth and hope. As Graubard examines and tries to reform Hanau, Robert meets a variety of characters who represent the silent majority or who have defied the hegemony in the centuries before. As the play concludes, the imagery focuses on the sun rising and a “new world that is being born”; the dissidents will be victorious. The final scene sees Graubard shoot Hanau, but his “divided self” dances offstage with Morning while Graubard discovers that it is now he who is imprisoned in the cage.

Hell Is What You Make It (performed by Unity Theatre in 1950)

Based on Ben Jonson’s *The Devil is an Ass*, this play opens in Purgatory where Captain Charon is taking a group of businessmen, aristocrats and army generals across the water to Hell. He finds a former miner, Adamson, alone in purgatory and decides to take him along. The upper-class characters meet Lucifer, who is attempting to quell industrial strike action led by the miners, and are ordered to work as taxi drivers or cleaners. None of them has ever worked, so this is a shocking revelation. Lucifer makes a deal: if any of them can find Adamson (who was meant for Heaven and not Hell), then they will regain their social status. Two of the new arrivals, Jessie Love and Nashe, warn Adamson about the plan. However, General Todt and Baldwin, two other inhabitants of Charon’s original boat, have hatched their own plan: that is to usurp Lucifer as leader of Hell. Amidst consistent references to the actions of Nazi officials (using the Jews as scapegoats, violence as “the only universal language” (35) and the destruction of the trade unions), Todt and Baldwin succeed in their plan and Lucifer must concede that the devil is no longer at the top of the hierarchy of evil. Finally, Todt and Baldwin are challenged by the miners and are sent to an asylum; Adamson is discovered and is told that a mistake has been made and that he should really be in Heaven. However, Adamson decides to stay in Hell with his friend MacKenna and the other workers in order to make Hell like Heaven. According to Adamson, the people of Heaven made Heaven, so the people of Hell can make their own Heaven: “look the sun’s coming up. It’s almost morning” (93).

Landscape with Chimneys (first produced in its final version— there are two early incarnations of this play in *Damnable Town*, *Portrait of a Salford Street* both written in the mid 1940s— by Theatre Workshop in 1951 and toured to South Wales)

Hugh and Frank return from the Second World War to their home city of Salford. At first their homecoming is hopeful; Hugh is reunited with wife Clare, Frank marries Jewish immigrant Trudi and the other inhabitants of the Salford street welcome them back with a party. However, as explained by the Stage Manager who acts as narrator, circumstances conspire against them. Hugh and Clare find it impossible to own their own house, while Trudi commits suicide with her baby when she feels she has become a burden to Frank. Other characters too have particular difficulties; Jessie is tied down to a dull job, Shaunnessy remains in poverty in spite of his dreams to win the pools and Gypsy tries to attack his girlfriend's father. However, the play ends with hope, as the characters unite together to protect Hugh and Clare from eviction while Clare gives birth to her son. They join to sing a song of protest, *Which Side Are You On?* The final scene sees Ginger, in a thinly veiled portrait of MacColl himself, pondering the meaning of life for individuals born in such an urban landscape.

The Long Winter (Blitz Song) (written in 1952)

This is another play that places the Second World War at its centre. Chris is a soldier in the army and has fought at Dunkirk. His wife Marion, who lives with her sister Clare, is having an affair with Alec whose wife is unwell. Marion attempts to find a solution to their problem and concedes that the death of Alec's wife and Chris at war would solve their difficulties. Chris returns from the war for a brief visit and explains his experiences and his desperation. Marion, wanting to be with Alec, kills Chris with his own gun. Marion justifies this act by saying that she has saved Chris from returning to the war and provided an opportunity to "live my life now this very minute" (25). There is an enquiry and the judge concludes that Chris died by misadventure, but Alec concedes that they cannot live happily together and strangles Marion when she threatens to go to the police, concluding that "no one can escape alone. We are part of things (82). One of MacColl's bleakest plays, *The Long Winter* does not end with the usual image of the sun rising or the possibility of change.

The Travellers (written and performed in 1952 at the Edinburgh People's Festival and revived at Stratford East in 1953)

The central image of this play is a railway train, which is visually and audibly denoted through light and recorded sounds. The play begins on a station platform somewhere in Middle Europe (announcements are given in English first and German second) where various characters are waiting for the train to arrive. An American soldier, Stevens, helps the passengers on to the train, and the play then focuses on each of the characters in turn. There are Katherine and Paul Lorentz who discuss the place of the working class in revolutionary change (although Paul has encouraged Katherine's socialist thought, he has since renounced his views and Katherine is wholly disillusioned by her husband's decision to write without overt reference to politics). There is also Kari, a former concentration camp prostitute, who, as the play progresses, is blackmailed by former Nazi general Eckhart now working for the Americans. In addition there is Anna, a Polish refugee who was forced into hard labour by the Nazis, and Maillard who was blinded by a Nazi general during the war. There is also the shadowy figure of Mehring. He is eventually revealed as a dissident voice who joined the train to warn the passengers, for the train is travelling physically towards something or somewhere which is never properly defined, but metaphorically signifies another world war. Mehring's warnings are eventually heeded by the passengers who rise up to stop the train. This play marks a timely challenge to the audience, performed in the period after the Second World War and at the time of the war in Korea.

You're Only Young Once (written in 1953 for Theatre Workshop's performances at the Warsaw Festival)

This play is a "folk tale with music". Set in the East End of London, the central figure Johnnie is a boxer who, like Johnny in *Johnny Noble*, is in love with a girl called Mary. It discusses the problems and everyday experiences of the working class through both traditional folk songs and MacColl's own. Finally the characters end up going to the folk festival in Warsaw where, in marked contrast to their dreary existence, the characters discover joy and freedom.

Eelsfoot (written in 1954)

The script suggests that this is “a modern folkmusical”. It was written in conjunction with Alan Lomax. It is set in a music bar and rehearsal room, and combines music and dialogue, even returning to one of MacColl’s most popular songs *Dirty Old Town*. There is the suggestion that “the Eelsfoot is a place where we can take a look at the way things might be tomorrow” (46); this bar and, by association, folk clubs more generally can be spaces of revolutionary potential.

So Long at the Fair (written in 1957 and produced at the Maxim Gorki Theatre, Berlin in 1961)

This play is set initially in an army detention centre. The inmates are former soldiers who have each committed some crime against the army authorities. The second half of the play moves to a fair which the soldiers visit on their parole day. It is here that the soldiers are free to explain the real reasons for their detention. The focus is on Turk who, like MacColl himself, has deserted from the army.

Ours the Fruit (commissioned by the Co-operative Society, written 1963 and produced at Drury Lane)

This play was written to celebrate the co-operative movement, and combines song and dialogue to create a historical examination of this tradition. It progresses from the 1700s through to the twentieth century, focusing on poverty, unemployment and lack of decent food. The co-operative movement is engendered by economic necessity and is celebrated as an emblem of working-class unity. Although it is a historical analysis, like many of MacColl’s plays, it concludes with a challenge to the audience: “men join with men a clean world to make” (65).

St George and the Dragon (written in circa 1964)

This is based on the traditional Mummers’ Play of the same name. In the original drama there is a fight between George and the challenger Slasher. One or other is killed and a Doctor is called to bring him back to life. It is a resurrection play associated with the Easter Season or New Year renewal. While retaining the conventions of the original Mummers’ Play form, MacColl updates the play; George enters the stage on a motorbike, he now has three challengers: Captain Slashell, a megalomaniac general, Golden Knight, representing the capitalist owners

of industry, and a Lawyer who ably condemns George with a fabricated charge. All are finally killed in battle and, as usual, a Doctor arrives who resurrects George with a kiss from Molly Vaughan. The upshot is that the hegemonic forces of society can be defeated and the dissident voices can have the victory.

Festival of Fools (written in late 1960s and 1970)

There are a couple of different versions of this play, which takes the established festival forms and transforms them in order to make a comment on contemporary socio-political situations. This thesis examines both the 1965 and 1970 versions. It is referred to as a “documentary folk fantasy” and examines the primary events of these years through a traditional structure, episodically constructed by dividing the play into the twelve months of the year. The plays look at subjects such as the treatment of dissident voices, the Vietnam War, the Rhodesia crisis and, more broadly, the foreign policies of America and Britain. The 1965 version concludes with the suggestion that “there is always room for hope” (65). Both plays discuss complex and indeed worrying situations through laughter and satirical critique, finally ending with the potential for hope.

The Shipmaster (written in 1981 and produced at the Library Theatre, Manchester)

This play is set in mid winter in 1905 and focuses on a collection of seamen in the Navy. Again MacColl uses his theatre to examine the experiences of the ordinary man of the military. The seamen complain about the Captains that lead them and their treatment in the armed forces. However, there is a pervading hope that socio-political revolution is a possibility.

APPENDIX TWO

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF PRIMARY AND SECONDARY MATERIAL RELATING TO EWAN MACCOLL

Plays:

Published versions of the plays

Gorner, Howard, and Ewan MacColl, eds. *Agit-prop to Theatre Workshop*. Manchester U.P., 1986.

This collection includes *John Bullion* (co-written with Joan Littlewood), *Newsboy* (by the Workers' Laboratory Theatre, New York; adapted from a poem by V.J. Jerome), *Last Edition* (extracts), *Johnny Noble*, *Uranium 235* and *The Other Animals*. It is now out of print.

MacColl, Ewan. *Uranium 235*. Glasgow: William MacLellan. Undated. Available in U.K. from the university libraries at Edinburgh, Leeds and Oxford.

Gorner, Howard. *The Theatre Workshop Story*. London: Eyre Methuen, 1981. In addition to extensive study of the Theatre Workshop company, this book also contains extracts from MacColl and Littlewood's plays *Classic Soil* and *Last Edition*, and reproductions of the company's insightful manifestos.

Unpublished plays in archives

7:84 (Scotland) archive, National Library of Scotland

This archive contains some of MacColl's unpublished plays.

It contains:

Operation Olive Branch adapted from Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* ACC 10893/223

The Flying Doctor adapted from Molière's play of the same name ACC 10893/214

The Long Winter ACC 10893/218

The Travellers ACC 10893/228

The Festival of Fools (1965 and 1970) ACC 10893/213

Hell is What You Make It adapted from Ben Jonson's *The Devil is an Ass* ACC 10893/216

Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger archive, Ruskin College, Oxford

<http://www.ruskin.ac.uk>

In addition to the plays above, this archive contains:

The Shipmaster

So Long at the Fair

Eelsfoot, a modern folkmusical by Alan Lomax with dialogue by Ewan MacColl.

The Damnable Town, a novelistic version of his later *Landscape with Chimneys*.

You're Only Young Once

St George and the Dragon, a "modern pace-egging play"

Portrait of a Salford Street, an earlier version of *Landscape with Chimneys*.

The Good Soldier Schweik

Landscape with Chimneys

Rogue's Gallery

There is a large room full of information about MacColl. Much of it relates to his folk music work rather than his work in theatre.

Joan Littlewood and the Theatre Workshop Collection 1937-1973

Michael Barker

Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin

<http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/research/fa/barker.html>

This archive contains a number of MacColl plays including *The Other Animals* and *So Long at the Fair*, but also plays not discussed in this thesis: *The Overcoat*, *Treasure Island* and *The Gallery Boy*.

Primary texts and resources

Frow, Edmund, and Ruth Frow. *The Worker's Theatre Movement in Manchester and Salford 1931-40*. WCML.

This text, by two of MacColl's compatriots and the founders of the WCML, Salford, points to the origins of the Red Megaphones and the company's metamorphosis into Theatre of Action.

Goorney, Howard, and Ewan MacColl, eds. *Agit-prop to Theatre Workshop*. Manchester U.P., 1986

In addition to the plays this book contains a prologue written by MacColl and an epilogue written by Goorney. Both are informative and entertaining. The former looks at the origins of Theatre Workshop and the production methods used for each of the plays in the collection. Goorney's afterword situates Theatre Workshop within a genealogy of politically engaged theatre.

Goorney, Howard. *The Theatre Workshop Story*. London: Eyre Methuen, 1981.

This was the first account of the influences and successes of the Theatre Workshop company. Until recently (with the publication of Leach's 2006 book) it was the only full-length commentary of Theatre Workshop. It reveals the influences upon MacColl and the company as they sought their new theatrical language.

Harker, Ben. 'Was there another England? Joan Littlewood in Manchester.' *North West labour history journal: Women in the North* 28 (2003) 36-41.

This article cites the origins of the theatre company and clearly lays out the important influences on MacColl and Littlewood's work.

Harker, Ben. 'The Manchester Rambler': Ewan MacColl and the 1932 Mass Trespass.' *History Workshop Journal* 59 (2005) 219-228.

http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/history_workshop_journal/v059/59.1harker.html (accessed 6/5/07)

Although this article is predominantly about the mass trespass, it is useful for background information about artistic and socio-historical influences.

Ben Harker is also writing a forthcoming biography of MacColl due for publication Summer 2007 (Pluto).

Hamish Henderson archive, National Library of Scotland

This archive contains six letters from MacColl to Henderson dated from 1950 to 1986. Of particular note is the letter dated 9th February 1950 which discusses Theatre Workshop's intention to move to Scotland ACC 10528.

Leach, Robert. *Theatre Workshop: Joan Littlewood and the Making of British Theatre*. Exeter UP, 2006.

This seminal study contains the first real survey of MacColl's plays. It discusses the history of the company, placing it within the socio-historical developments of the twentieth century. Leach has also included a chronology of plays. Chapter Eight concentrates solely upon MacColl's plays and is the most helpful starting point for any scholar of his work.

Littlewood, Joan. *Joan's Book: the autobiography of Joan Littlewood*. London: Methuen, 2003.

This autobiography by MacColl's theatrical partner describes the development of Theatre Workshop's aesthetic from its earliest incarnation as the Red Megaphones to the work at Stratford after 1952. Much of it focuses on the period after MacColl's split from the company; however, it does contain a number of important anecdotes and descriptions of the production of MacColl's plays.

McCall, Al. 'From theatre to folk club.' *Green Left Weekly* (1997).

www.greenleft.org.au/back/1997/290/290p28.htm accessed 14/7/06.

This is a brief survey of MacColl's early stage influences and his work with Theatre Workshop.

MacColl, Ewan. *Journeyman*. London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1990.

This is a good starting point for study of MacColl's theatre as it contains information about his political stance, and connects his early life and influences with his later stage work. It is also a very entertaining read, written in his own conversational style.

--- 'The Grassroots of Theatre Workshop.' *Theatre Quarterly* III 9 (Jan-Mar 1973) 58-68.

The author describes his own influences from the Greek epic to the Jacobean to Twentieth century movements such as Constructivism and Expressionism. It is a useful starting point for discerning the company's primary inspirations.

--- *The Voice of Experience: selections from the teaching of Ewan MacColl with the Critics Group 1964-69*. Record. Charles Parker. Charles Parker Archive Trust.

This is a recording of MacColl speaking of his interest in theatre and music. It focuses particularly on the use of actuality, the importance of discussing the everyday experiences of the working class and how to best communicate the "emotion that shakes him".

Orr, Mary, and Michael O'Rourke. *Parsley, Sage and Politics: The Lives of Peggy Seeger and Ewan MacColl*. 1985.

These tapes contain interviews with MacColl and Seeger, and also with many other notable figures. Parts Two and Three discuss MacColl's early life in Salford, his membership in the Young Communist League and his work with the Red Megaphones. Part Four, *Stage Left*, analyses the importance of Theatre Workshop and, specifically, of his plays. The later tapes focus on the Radio Ballads and on his work with Peggy Seeger in the Folk Revival.

Peggy Seeger's website <http://www.pegseeger.com/html/ewan.html> has some good information about MacColl's work and links to WCML and Ruskin Library as well, as you would expect, as details about his career in folk music.

Paget, Derek. 'Theatre Workshop, Mousinnac, and the European Connection.' *New Theatre Quarterly*, XI 43 (August 1995).

This paper discusses the influence of Mousinnac's book upon the company and the importance of Theatre Workshop in bringing aspects of the Continental avant-garde to the British stage.

Rhythms of the World: the Ballad of Ewan MacColl. Dir. Tim May. BBC 2. 14 October 1990.

Produced in the year after MacColl's death, this programme contains interviews with Peggy Seeger and Edward Frow amongst others and discusses MacColl's work

with Theatre Workshop and his later participation in the folk revival. It also connects MacColl's work with his early influences—the Salford landscape, his Scottish heritage, his developing interest in art, and the political groups he joined.

Samuel, Raphael, Ewan MacColl, and Stuart Cosgrove. *Theatres of the Left 1880s-1935: Workers' Theatre Movements in Britain and America*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985.

This book, co-written by MacColl, examines politically engaged theatre from the late nineteenth century onwards. He writes an informative chapter on the early development of Theatre of Action and is particularly useful for research into the period leading up to the creation of Theatre Workshop.

Unsorted box at Working Class Movement Library, Salford

<http://www.wcml.org.uk/>

This does not contain any plays but there is some useful photographs relating to the writing of *Landscape with Chimneys*, some information about *Operation Olive Branch* and *Uranium 235* and the collection of the Radio Ballads in addition to some further information about his folk music career. The library holds a copy of the individual publication of *Uranium 235*. There is also a plaque upon the wall of this library stating that Ewan MacColl lived near here.

The Working Class Movement Library has an excellent website with extensive information about MacColl and his theatre including articles written by Peggy Seeger and Howard Goorney.

Woods, Fred. 'And So We Sang.' *Folk Review* (May- August 1973).

Woods' conversation with MacColl is published in four editions of *Folk Review*. It discusses the whole of MacColl's career from his time in Salford learning Scottish folk songs from his mother to his work on the Radio Ballads. It makes many useful connections between his theatre and his music and explores many of his chief influences from the Blue Blouse movement to the Expressionists to Bertolt Brecht.

Secondary Texts containing some mention of Ewan MacColl and Theatre

It must be noted that there are many more texts that discuss Littlewood and Theatre Workshop after the move to Stratford in the early 1950s. This bibliography will not specifically address these texts unless they provide information regarding the plays. There are also other books and articles that include very brief references to MacColl's stage work; unless these texts provide substantial useful information relating to his work or places the plays in a specific genealogy of experimental politically engaged theatre, these are not cited.

Bradby, David, Louis James, and Bernard Sharratt. *Performance and Politics in Popular Drama*. Cambridge UP, 1980

MacColl is mentioned in Raphael Samuel's chapter *Workers' Theatre 1926-36* (213, 219). The author refers to MacColl's early work with the Red Megaphones.

Chambers, Colin. *The Story of Unity Theatre*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989.

This book is primarily concerned with the development of Unity Theatre but it does contain some useful comparative information about MacColl and Theatre Workshop.

Chambers, Colin and Mike Prior. *Playwright's Progress*. Oxford: Amber Lane, 1987.

This excellent text contains 4 well-researched pages about MacColl's plays. It also points to the connection between MacColl and 7:84 (70).

Holdsworth, Nadine. *Joan Littlewood*. London: Routledge, 2006.

This is the first of a number of new texts on the Theatre Workshop company. It is an introductory account of Littlewood's work and is a very useful starting point for anyone with an interest in the company. Many of MacColl's plays are mentioned as examples of the development of Theatre Workshop's general aesthetic. It also contains some photographs of the staging for *Operation Olive Branch* and *The Other Animals*.

Kershaw, Baz. *Politics of Performance*. London: Routledge, 1992.

This contains a brief mention of MacColl and his theatre with reference to agitprop (79) and his later *Festival of Fools* (101).

Kershaw, Baz, ed. *The Cambridge History of British Theatre: volume 3 Since 1895*. Cambridge UP, 2004.

Kershaw briefly mentions the early origins of Theatre Workshop and the companies use of innovative techniques, "the European traditions of expressionism, constructivism and epic theatre" (355).

MacKenney, Linda. *The Activities of Popular Dramatists and Drama Groups in Scotland, 1900-1952*. Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2000.

A comprehensive account of MacColl's plays and particularly interesting for those studying Scottish theatre. Contains a list of Theatre Workshop productions in Scotland and mentions the importance of MacColl's theatrical work.

McGrath, John. *Naked Thoughts that Roam about*. Ed. Nadine Holdsworth. London: Nick Hern, 2002.

McGrath often mentions MacColl and Littlewood and their innovations in politically engaged theatre. In this book he briefly refers back to the beginning of the company when it retained the name Red Megaphones.

Nicholson, Steve. *British Theatre and the Red Peril: the portrayal of Communism 1917-1945*. Exeter UP, 1999.

There is a brief description of MacColl as a "driving force behind Manchester's Theatre of Action" (92).

Roberts, Peter, ed. *The Best of Plays and Players 1953-1968*. London: Methuen, 1988.

This informative text contains brief mention of MacColl's play *Uranium235* citing it as written in a "documentary extravaganza form" (211).

Russell, Ian and David Atkinson. *Folk song: tradition, revival and re-creation*. Elphinstone Institute: University of Aberdeen, 2004.

Although this book is predominantly about the folk tradition, it does contain a fascinating article by Michael Verrier which discusses MacColl's links with Brecht and his use of Brechtian theatrical conventions in his folk song presentations.

Shellard, Dominic. *British Theatre Since the War*. Yale UP, 1999.

This text provides a short but detailed account of the origins of Theatre Workshop (60-62).

Stourac, Richard and Kathleen McCreery. *Theatre as a Weapon: Workers' Theatre in the Soviet Union, Germany and Britain, 1917-1934*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986.

This seminal text contains brief mention of the early development of the Red Megaphones.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- A Communist Policy for the Theatre*. London: Farleigh Press, 1948.
- Abel, Lionel. *Metatheatre: a new view of dramatic form*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1969.
- Adorno, Theodor. *In Search of Wagner*. Trans. Rodney Livingstone. NLB, 1981.
- Andrews, Allen. *The Life of L.S. Lowry, 1887-1976*. London: Jupiter, 1977.
- Andrews, Geoff, Nina Fishman, and Kevin Morgan. *Opening the Books: Essays on the Social and Cultural History of British Communism*. London: Pluto, 1995.
- Appia, Adolphe. *Music and the Art of Theatre*. Trans. Robert W. Corrigan and Mary Douglas Dirks. Miami UP, 1962.
- *Work of Living Art and Man is the Measure of All Things*. Trans. HD Albright and Barnard Hewitt. Miami UP, 1975.
- Aristophanes. *The Archarnians, the Clouds, Lysistrata*. London: Penguin, 1973.
- *Lysistrata*. Ed. Dudley Fitts. London: Faber and Faber, 1955.
- Arnott, Peter D. *Introduction to Greek Theatre*. New York: St Martin's Press, 1965.
- Auden, WH. *The Dance of Death*. London: Faber and Faber, 1933.
- *Plays and Dramatic Writings*. Ed. Edward Mendelson. London: Faber and Faber, 1989.
- *Libretti and Other Dramatic Writings*. Ed. Edward Mendelson. London: Faber and Faber, 1993.
- Baer, Nancy von Norman. *Theatre in Revolution: Russian Avant-Garde Stage Design 1913-1935*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1991.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*. Trans. Hélène Iswolsky. Indiana UP, 1984.
- Banham, Martin, ed. *The Cambridge Guide to Theatre*. Cambridge UP, 1995.
- Banks, GL. *The Manchester Man*. London: EJ Morten, 1991.
- Bann, Stephen, ed. *The Tradition of Constructivism*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1974.
- Barton, Anne. *Ben Jonson: dramatist*. Cambridge UP, 1984.
- Baudelaire, Charles. *Art in Paris 1845-1862: salons and other exhibitions*. Trans. and Ed. Jonathan Mayne. Oxford: Phaidon, 1965.
- *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*. London: Phaidon, 1995.
- Bauman, Richard, ed. *Folklore, Cultural Performance and Popular Entertainments*. Oxford UP, 1992.
- Beacham, Richard C. *Adolphe Appia: artist and visionary of the modern theatre*. Reading: Harwood, 1994.
- Beaumarchais, Pierre-Augustin de. *The Marriage of Figaro*. Trans. Stephen Mulrine. London: Nick Hern, 2001.
- Behan, Brendan. *The Quare Fellow*. London: Methuen, 1956.
- Behan, Tom. *Dario Fo: Revolutionary Theatre*. London: Pluto Press, 2000.
- Benjamin, Walter. *One way Street and other Writings*. Trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter. London: NLB, 1979.
- *Understanding Brecht*. Trans. Anna Bostock. London: Verso, 1992.
- 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'. *Literary Theory: an anthology*. Eds. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000.
- Benson, Renate. *German Expressionist Drama: Ernst Toller and Georg Kaiser*. London: MacMillan, 1984.
- Bentley, Eric, ed. *The Theory of the Modern Stage*. London: Penguin, 1979.
- Boal, Augusto. *Theater of the Oppressed*. Trans. Charles A. and Maria Odilia Leal McBride. London: Pluto, 1979.

- Bodek, Richard. *Proletarian Performance in Weimar Berlin: Agitprop, chorus and Brecht*. Columbia: Camden House, 1997.
- Bohlman, Philip V. *The Study of Folk Music in the Modern World*. Indiana UP, 1988.
- Bold, Alan, ed. *The Letters of Hugh MacDiarmid*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1984.
- Bordwell, David. *The Cinema of Eisenstein*. Harvard UP, 1993.
- Bowie, AM. *Aristophanes: myth, ritual and comedy*. Cambridge UP, 1993.
- Bradby, David, Louis James, and Bernard Sherratt eds. *Performance and Politics in popular drama: aspects of popular entertainment in theatre, film and television 1800-1976*. Cambridge UP, 1981.
- Bradby, David and John McCormick. *People's Theatre*. London: Croom Helm, 1978.
- Branson, Noreen. *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain 1927-1941*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1985.
- Braun, Edward. *The Theatre of Meyerhold: Revolution on the Modern Stage*. London: Eyre Methuen, 1979.
- Brecht, Bertolt. *Brecht on Theatre: the development of an aesthetic*. Trans. and Ed. John Willett. London: Methuen, 2001.
- *Brecht on Art and Politics*. Eds. Tom Kuhn and Steve Giles. London: Methuen, 2003.
- *The Life of Galileo*. Trans. Desmond I. Vesey. London: Methuen, 1963.
- 'The Mother'. *Collected Plays: three*. Ed. John Willett. London: Methuen, 1997.
- *The Messingkauf Dialogues*. Trans. John Willett. London: Methuen, 2002.
- 'The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui'. *Collected Plays: six*. Eds. John Willett and Ralph Manheim. London: Methuen, 1994.
- Brighouse, Harold. *Hobson's Choice*. London: Heinemann, 1964.
- Brocken, Michael. *The British Folk revival, 1944-2002*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003.
- Brook, Peter. *The Empty Space*. London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1968.
- Buchan, David. *The Ballad and the Folk*. London: Kegan Paul, 1972.
- Bürger, Peter. *Theory of the Avant-garde*. Trans. Michael Shaw. Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1999.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. London: Routledge, 1999.
- Cairns, Christopher, ed. *The Commedia Dell'arte from the Renaissance to Dario Fo*. Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989.
- Cass, Eddie and Steve Roud. *An Introduction to the English Mummers' Play*. London: English Folk Dance and Song Society, 2002.
- Cass, Eddie, Michael J. Preston, and Paul Smith. *The English Mumming Play: an introductory bibliography*. London: FLS Books, 2000.
- Chambers, Colin. *The Story of Unity Theatre*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989.
- Cheeseman, Peter. *Fight for Shelton Bar*. London: Methuen, 1977.
- *The Knotty: a musical documentary*. London: Methuen, 1970.
- Clark, Jon, et al, eds. *Culture and Crisis in Britain in the Thirties*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1979.
- Chlumberg, Hans. *Miracle at Verdun*. Trans. Edward Crankshaw. London: Victor Gollancz, 1932.
- Clayton, J. Douglas. *Pierrot in Petrograd: the Commedia dell'Arte/Balagan in Twentieth-Century Russian Theatre and Drama*. Montreal-McGill-Queens UP, 1993.
- Cole, GDH. *A Short History of the British Working-Class Movement 1789-1947*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1966.
- Cole, GDH and Raymond Postgate. *The Common People, 1746-1946*. London: Methuen, 1946.
- Cole, Toby, ed. *Playwrights on Playwriting*. New York: Dramabook, 1961.

Colvin, Stephen. *Dialect in Aristophanes and the politics of language in ancient Greek literature*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1999.

Cornford, Francis MacDonald. *The Origin of Attic Comedy*. Cambridge UP, 1934.

Corrie, Joe. *Plays, poems and theatre writings*. Edinburgh: 7:84 publications, 1985.

Cowan, Edward J, ed. *The People's Past*. Edinburgh: Polygon, 1980.

Coward, Noel. *Plays: Five*. London: Methuen, 1983.

Cows, Mary Ann. *City Images: Perspectives from Literature, Philosophy and Film*. New York: Gordon and Breach, 1991.

Craig, Edward Gordon. *On the Art of the Theatre*. London: Heinemann, 1957.

Croft, Andy, ed. *A Weapon in the Struggle: the Cultural History of the Communist Party in Britain*. London: Pluto, 1998.

Cross, Jonathan, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Stravinsky*. Cambridge UP, 2003.

Davies, Andrew and Steven Fielding, eds. *Workers worlds: cultures and communities in Manchester and Salford, 1880-1939*. Manchester UP, 1992.

Davies, Andrew. *Leisure, gender and poverty: working-class culture in Salford and Manchester 1900-1939*. Open UP, 1992.

Davies, Andrew. *Other theatres: the development of alternative and experimental theatre in Britain*. London: MacMillan, 1987.

De Vega, Lope. *Fuente Ovejuna*, Trans. Victor Dixon. Wiltshire: Aris and Philips, 1989.

Delaney, Shelagh. *A Taste of Honey*. London: Methuen, 1962.

Desmet, Christy and Robert Sawyer, eds. *Shakespeare and Appropriation*. London: Routledge, 1999.

Dickens, Charles. *Hard Times*. London: Penguin, 2003.

Dollimore, Jonathan and Alan Sinfield, eds. *Political Shakespeare: essays in cultural materialism*. Manchester UP, 1994.

Dollimore, Jonathan. *Radical Tragedy*. Sussex: Harvester, 1986.

Dorson, Richard M, ed. *Folklore and Folklife*. Chicago UP, 1972.

Dove, Richard. *He was a German: a biography of Ernst Toller*. London: Libris, 1990.

Dover, KJ. *Aristophanic Comedy*. California UP, 1972.

Drain, Richard. *Twentieth Century Theatre: a sourcebook*. London: Routledge, 1995.

Draper, RP, ed. *Tragedy: developments in criticism*. London: MacMillan, 1980.

Dundes, Alan, ed. *Folklore: critical concepts in literacy and cultural studies, vol 1: from definition to discipline*. London: Routledge, 2005.

Dutton, Richard, ed. *Ben Jonson*. Essex: Pearson, 2000.

Eagleton, Terry. *Whatever happened to English Modernism?* University of Gloucester: Cyder, 2003.

--- *William Shakespeare*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986.

Edwards, Ness. *The Workers' Theatre*. Caerdydd: Cymric Federation, 1930.

Eisenstein, Sergei. *Selected Works: volume II Towards a theory of Montage*. Eds Michael Glenny and Richard Taylor. London: BFI, 1991.

--- *Film Form*. Trans. and Ed. Jay Leyda. London: Dennis Dobson, 1951.

Eliot, T.S. 'The Wasteland'. Abrams et al, eds. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature, vol. 2*. 2000. 2369-2383.

Elvgren Jnr, Gillete A. 'Documentary Theatre at Stoke-on-Trent'. *Educational Theatre Journal* 26 1 (Mar 1974) 86-98.

E.M.W 'Pace Egger's Play from North Lancashire'. *Folklore* 52 2 (June 1941) 150-152.

Engels, Friedrich. *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. London, Penguin, 1987.

- Evans, G. Blakemore. *Elizabethan-Jacobean Drama*. London, A&C Black, 1989.
- Evans, Robert. *Jonson and the context of his time*. London: Associated University Presses, 1994.
- Eyerman, Ron and Andrew Jamison. *Music and Social Movements: mobilizing tradition in the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge UP, 1998.
- Faulkner, Peter. *A Modernist Reader: Modernism in England 1910-1930*. London: BT Batsford, 1986.
- Flickinger, Roy. *The Greek Theater and its Drama*. Chicago UP, 1936.
- Fo, Dario. *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*. Trans. Simon Nye. London: Methuen, 2003.
- *Mistero Buffo*. Ed Stuart Hood. Trans. Ed Emery. London: Methuen, 1988.
- *The Tricks of the Trade*. Trans. Joe Farrell. London: Methuen, 1991.
- *Trumpets and Raspberries*. Ed. Franca Rame. Trans. R.C. McAvoy and A-M Giugni. London: Pluto Press, 1984
- Foley, James Miles. *Oral- Formulaic Theory: A folklore casebook*. New York: Garland, 1990.
- Frisby, David. *Cityscapes of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity, 2001.
- Frow, Edmund, and Ruth Frow. *The Battle for Bexley Square*. Working Class Movement Library, 1994.
- *The Communist Party in Manchester 1920-1926*. North West History Group.
- *To Make that Future Now!* Manchester: EJ Morten, 1976.
- 'The Workers' Theatre Movement in Manchester and Salford 1931-1940'. *North West Labour History* 17 (1992/3) 66-73.
- Furness, RS. *Expressionism*. London: Methuen, 1973.
- Garland, Henry, and Mary Garland. *Oxford Companion to German Literature*. Oxford UP, 1997.
- Garten, HF. *Modern German Drama*. London: Methuen, 1959.
- Gaskell, Elizabeth. *Mary Barton*. Middlesex: Penguin, 1979.
- Gay, John. *The Beggar's Opera*. Loughrey, Eds. Bryan and T.O. Treadwell. London: Penguin, 1986.
- George, David J, and Christopher J. Gossip eds. *Studies in the Commedia dell'Arte*. Cardiff: Wales UP, 1993.
- Gladkov, Aleksandr. *Meyerhold speaks, Meyerhold rehearses*. Trans. and Ed. Alma Law. Amsterdam: Overseas Publishers Association, 1997.
- Glen, Duncan. *Hugh MacDiarmid and the Scottish Renaissance*. Edinburgh: Chambers, 1964.
- Goldberg, Jonathan. *James I and the Politics of Literature*. John Hopkins UP, 1983.
- Goldman, Jane. *Modernism, 1910-1945: Image to Apocalypse*. Palgrave MacMillan, 2004.
- Gorney, Howard. *The Theatre Workshop Story*. London: Eyre Methuen, 1981.
- Gorney, Howard, and Ewan MacColl eds. *Agit-prop to Theatre Workshop: political playscripts 1930-50*. Manchester UP, 1986.
- Gordon, Donald E. *Expressionism: art and idea*. Yale UP, 1987.
- Gordon, Mel. 'Meyerhold's Biomechanics'. *Drama Review*. 18.3 (September 1974) 73-88.
- 'German Expressionist Acting.' *Drama Review* 19.3 (September 1975) 34-46.
- 'Lazzi': *the comic routines of the Commedia dell'Arte*. New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1983.
- Gorelik, Mordecai. *New Theatres for Old*. London: Dennis Dobson, 1947.
- Gramsci, Antonio. 'Hegemony from The Formation of Intellectuals'. Eds. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. *Literary Theory: an anthology*. London: Blackwell, 2000 277.

- *A Gramsci Reader: selected writings 1916-1935*. Ed. David Forgacs. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988.
- *Selections from Cultural Writings*. Eds. David Forgacs and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith. Trans. William Boelhower. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1985.
- *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. Trans. and Eds. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. New York: International, 1971.
- Gray, Nigel. *The Worst of Times*. London: Wildwood, 1985.
- Green, Martin, and John Swan. *The Triumph of Pierrot: the Commedia dell'arte and the Modern Imagination*. New York: MacMillan, 1986.
- Greenwood, Walter. *Love on the Dole*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1983 (1933).
- 'Love on the Dole'. *Plays of the Thirties: volume 1*. London: Pan, 1966.
- Griffiths, David. *Mask: a release of acting resources. Volume three: the Italian Commedia*. Amsterdam: Overseas Publishers Association, 1998.
- Guins, Raiford, and Omayra Zaragoza Cruz, eds. *Popular Culture: a reader*. London: Sage, 2005.
- Hampson, Charles P. *Salford through the Ages*. Manchester: E.J. Morten, 1930.
- Hannington, Wal. *Ten Lean Years: an examination of the record of the national government in the field of unemployment*. London: Victor Gollantz, 1940.
- *Unemployed Struggles 1919-1936*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1979.
- Harker, Ben. "Was there another England? Joan Littlewood in Manchester". *North West Labour History Journal*. 28 (2003) 36-41.
- 'The Manchester Rambler': Ewan MacColl and the 1932 Mass Trespass. *History Workshop Journal* 59 (2005) 219-228.
- Harrison, Tony. *Selected Poems*. London: Penguin, 1987.
- Hartnoll, Phyllis. *A Concise History of the Theatre*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1968.
- Hašek, Jaroslav. *The Good Soldier Schweik*. Trans. Cecil Parrott. London: Penguin, 2000.
- Hauptmann, Gerhart. *The Weavers*. Trans. Frank Marcus. London: Methuen, 1980.
- Helm, Alex. *The English Mummer's Play*. Woodbridge, Suffolk: Folklore Society, Boydell and Brewer, 1981.
- *Five Mumming Plays for Schools*. London: Folklore Society and English Folk Dance and Song Society, 1965.
- Henderson, Hamish. *Alias MacAlias: writings on songs, folk and literature*. Edinburgh: Polygon, 1992.
- Letters 1950-1986. National Library of Scotland ACC 10528
- Hobsbawm, Eric, and Terence Ranger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge UP, 1983.
- Hoggart, Richard. *The Uses of Literacy*. London: Penguin, 1960.
- Holderness, Graham, ed. *The Politics of Theatre and Drama*. London: MacMillan, 1992.
- Holdworth, Nadine. *Joan Littlewood*. London: Routledge, 2006.
- Hopkins, Eric. *A Social History of the English Working Classes: 1815-1945*. London: Edward Arnold, 1979.
- Hough, AE. *The Attic Theatre*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1907.
- Howard, Michael. *Lowry: a Visionary Artist*. Salford: Lowry Press, 2000.
- Hunt, Albert. *Hopes for Great Happenings: alternatives in education and theatre*. London: Eyre Methuen, 1976.
- *John Ford's Cuban Missile Crisis: Bradford Art College Group*. London: Eyre Methuen, 1972.
- Hutt, Allen. *The Postwar History of the British Working Class*. London: Victor Gollancz, 1937.

- Hutton, Ronald. *The Station of the Sun: A History of the Ritual Year in Britain*. Oxford UP, 1997.
- Innes, Christopher. *Modern British Drama: the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge UP, 2002.
- Jameson, Frederic. *Brecht and Method*. London: Verso, 1998.
- Jameson, Frederic, ed. *Aesthetics and Politics*. London: NLB, 1977.
- Jaques-Dalcroze. *The Eurythmics of Jaques-Dalcroze*. London: Constable, 1917.
- Jones, Dave. *Chartism and the Chartists*. London: Allen Lane, Penguin, 1975.
- Jonson, Ben. *The Devil is an Ass*. Ed. Peter Happè. Manchester UP, 1994.
- Three Comedies*. Ed. Michael Jamieson. London: Penguin, 1966.
- Kaiser, Georg. *Five Plays*. Trans. BJ Kenworthy, Rex Last, and JM Ritchie. London: Calder and Boyars, 1971.
- *Plays: volume two*. Trans. BJ Kenworthy, HF Garten, and Elizabeth Sprigge. London: John Calder, 1981.
- Kandinsky, Wassily and Franz Marc, eds. *The 'Blaue Reiter' Almanac*. Ed. Klaus Lankheit. London: Thames and Hudson, 1974.
- Kenez, Peter. *Cinema and Soviet Society: from the Revolution to the Death of Stalin*. London: IB Tauris, 2001.
- Kenner, Hugh. *The Pound Era*. London: Pimlico, 1991.
- Kettle, Arnold, ed. *The Nineteenth-Century Novel: critical essays and documents*. London: Heinemann, 1972.
- Kinney, Arthur F, ed. *A Companion to Renaissance Drama*. London: Blackwell, 2002.
- Kleberg, Lars. *Theatre as Action: Soviet Russian Avant-Garde Aesthetics*. Trans. Charles Rogle. London: MacMillan, 1993.
- Knights, L.C. *Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson*. Middlesex: Penguin, 1962 (1937).
- Kuhns, David F. *German Expressionist Theatre: the actor and the stage*. Cambridge UP, 1997.
- Laban, Rudolf. *Choreutics*. Ed. Lisa Ullmann. London: MacDonald and Evans, 1966.
- *Effort*. London: MacDonald and Evans, 1947.
- *A Life for Dance*. Trans and annotated Lisa Ullmann. London: MacDonald and Evans, 1975.
- *The Mastery of Movement*. London: MacDonald and Evans, 1971.
- *Modern Educational Dance*. Plymouth: Northcote House, 1988.
- Lamont Stewart, Ena. *Men Should Weep*. London: Samuel French, 1983.
- Lang, Berel, and Forrest Williams, eds. *Marxism and Art: writings in aesthetics and criticism*. New York: David McKay, 1972.
- Law, Alma. Meyerhold's 'The Magnanimous Cuckold'. *Drama Review*. 26.1 (Spring 1982) 61-86.
- Lawrence, DH. *Complete Plays*. London: Heinemann, 1965.
- Laybourn, Keith. *Britain on the Breadline*. Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1990.
- Leach, Robert. *Revolutionary Theatre*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- *Theatre Workshop: Joan Littlewood and the Making of Modern British Theatre*. Exeter UP, 2006.
- *Stanislavsky and Meyerhold*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2003.
- Leach, Robert. *The World of the Folk Play*. London: Harrap, 1978.
- Leach, Robert, and Victor Borovsky. *A History of Russian Theatre*. Cambridge UP, 1999.

- Levenson, Michael. *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*. Cambridge UP, 1999.
- Littlewood, Joan. *From Kendal to Berlin: the diary of Theatre Workshop*. Prod. Norman Swallow. Manchester Radio. 5th Aug 1947.
- *Joan's Book: the autobiography of Joan Littlewood*. London: Methuen, 2003.
- Lloyd, AL. *Folk Song in England*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1967.
- Lodder, Christina. *Russian Constructivism*. Yale UP, 1990.
- Lorca, Federico Garcia. *Five Plays*. Trans. James Graham-Lujan, and Richard L. O'Connell. London: Penguin, 2000.
- Lukàcs Georg. *The Historical Novel*. Trans. Hannah, and Stanley Mitchell. London: Merlin, 1989.
- *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*. Trans. John, and Necke Mander. London: Merlin, 1962.
- Lynch, Kevin. *The Image of the City*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT press, 1960.
- Lyon, Janet. *Manifestoes: provocations of the modern*. Cornell UP, 1999.
- MacColl, Ewan. *Journeyman*. London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1990.
- *The Essential Ewan MacColl Songbook*. Ed. Peggy Seeger. New York: Oak, 2001.
- *The Shuttle and the Cage: Industrial Folk-ballads*. Workers' Music Association, 1954.
- 'The Grassroots of Theatre Workshop'. *Theatre Quarterly* III 9 (Jan-Mar 1973) 58-68.
- *The Voice of Experience: selections from the teaching of Ewan MacColl with the Critics Group 1964-69*. Record. Charles Parker. Charles Parker Archive Trust. (for individual plays see Appendix 2)
- MacKenney, Linda. *The Activities of Popular Dramatists and Drama Groups in Scotland, 1900-1952*. Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2000.
- MacKinnon, Niall. *The British Folk Scene: musical performance and social identity*. Open UP, 1993.
- MacLennan, Elizabeth. *The Moon Belongs to Everyone: making theatre with 7:84*. London: Methuen, 1990.
- Mander, Raymond, and Joe Mitchenson. *Pantomime: a story in pictures*. London: Peter Davies, 1973.
- Marcus, Leah S. *The Politics of Mirth*. Chicago UP, 1989.
- Marinetti, Filippo Tommaso. 'Manifesto of Futurism'. Eds. Vassiliki Kolocotroni, Jane Goldman, and Olga Taxidou. *Modernism: an anthology of source and documents*. Edinburgh UP, 1998 251-253.
- Marsden, Jean I, ed. *The Appropriation of Shakespeare*. Hertfordshire: Hemel Hempstead, 1991.
- Marx, Karl. *The Communist Manifesto*. Ed. Frederic L. Bender. New York: Norton, 1988.
- Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. *Marx and Engels on Britain*. Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953.
- Matthew, HCG, and Brian Harrison. *Oxford dictionary of national biography vol. 21*. Oxford UP, c2004.
- Mayer III, David. *Harlequin in His Element: The English Pantomime, 1806-1836*. Harvard UP, 1969.
- McCall, Al. 'From theatre to folk club'. *Green Left Weekly* (1997). www.greenleft.org.au/back/1997/290/290p28.htm.
- McCulloch, Margery Palmer. *Modernism and Nationalism: Literature and Society in Scotland 1918-1939: Source Documents for the Scottish Renaissance*. Glasgow: The Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2004.

- McDonald, Russ. *Shakespeare and Jonson/ Jonson and Shakespeare*. Sussex: Harvester, 1988.
- McGrath, John. *Blood Red Roses and Swings and Roundabouts*. Aberdeen: 7:84 publications and Aberdeen People's Press, 1981.
- *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil*. London: Eyre Methuen, 1981.
- *The Game's A Bogey*. Edinburgh: EUSPB, 1975.
- *A Good Night Out: Popular Theatre: Audience, Class and Form*. London: Nick Hern, 1996.
- *Joe's Drum*. Aberdeen: 7:84 publications and Aberdeen People's Press, 1979.
- *Little Red Hen*. London: Pluto, 1977.
- *Naked Thoughts That Roam About*. Ed. Nadine Holdsworth. London: Nick Hern, 2002.
- *Random Happenings in the Hebrides*. London: Davis Poynter, 1972.
- McLeish, Kenneth. *A Guide to Greek theatre and drama*. London: Methuen, 2003.
- Merchant, W. Moelwyn. *Comedy*. London: Methuen, 1972.
- Mews, Siegfried, ed. *A Bertolt Brecht Companion*. Westport, Connecticut, 1997.
- Mitchell, Tony. *Dario Fo: people's court jester*. London: Methuen, 1984.
- Molière, Jean-Baptiste Poquelin. *One-Act Comedies of Molière*. Trans. Albert Bermel. New York: Applause, 1992.
- Morgan, Kevin. *Against Fascism and War: Ruptures and continuities in British Communist Politics, 1935-41*. Manchester UP, 1989.
- Mousinnac, Leon. *The New Movement in Theatre*. New York: B Blom, 1931.
- Mowat, Charles Loch. *Britain between the Wars 1918-1940*. London: Methuen, 1955.
- Mumford, Lewis. *The Culture of Cities*. London: Secker and Warburg, 1953.
- Nicholl, Allardyce *The World of Harlequin: a critical study of the commedia dell'arte*. Cambridge UP, 1963.
- Nicolson, Steve. *British Theatre and the Red Peril: the portrayal of Communism 1917-1945*. Exeter UP, 1999.
- O'Casey, Sean. *Three plays*. London: MacMillan, 1963.
- O'Neill, Eugene. *'Ah Wilderness' and Other Plays*. Middlesex: Penguin, 1971.
- Oreglia, Giacomo. *The Commedia dell'arte*. Trans. Lovett F. Edwards. London: Methuen, 1968.
- Orgel, Stephen. *The Illusion of Power: political theater in the English Renaissance*. California UP, 1975.
- Orr, Mary, and Michael O'Rourke. *Parsley, Sage and Politics: The Lives of Peggy Seeger and Ewan MacColl*. 1985
- Paget, Derek. 'Oh What a Lovely War: the Texts and their Context.' *New Theatre Quarterly* VI. 23 (1993) 244-260.
- 'Theatre Workshop, Moussinac and the European Connection.' *New Theatre Quarterly* XI. 43 (1995) 211-224.
- Peck, Jamie, and Kevin Ward. *City of Revolution: restructuring Manchester*. Manchester UP, 2002.
- Pegg, Bob. *Rites and Riots: folk customs of Britain and Europe*. Poole: Blandford Press, 1981.
- Pelling, Henry. *The British Communist Party: a historical profile*. London: Adam and Charles Black, 1975.
- Pietropaolo, Domenico, ed. *The Silence of Buffoonery: Theory and History of the Commedia dell'arte*. Ottawa: Dovehouse, 1989.
- Pike, Burton. *The Image of the City in Modern Literature*. Princeton UP, 1981.
- Piscator, Erwin. *The Political Theatre*. Trans. Hugh Rorrison. London: Eyre Methuen, 1980.

- Pitches, Jonathan. *Vsevolod Meyerhold*. London: Routledge, 2003.
- Pogson, Rex. *Miss Hornimann and the Gaiety Theatre Manchester*. London: Rockliff, 1952.
- Poggioli, Renato. *The Theory of the Avant-garde*. Trans. Gerald Fitzgerald. Harvard UP, 1968.
- Prentki, Tim, and Jan Selman. *Popular Theatre in Political Culture: Britain and Canada in focus*. Bristol: Intellect, 2000.
- Preston-Dunlop, Valerie. *Practical Kinetography Laban*. London: MacDonald and Evans, 1969.
- *Rudolf Laban: an extraordinary life*. London: Dance Books, 1998.
- Priestley, J.B. *English Journey*. London: William Heinemann, 1935.
- Proschan, Frank. 'Puppet Voices and Interlocutors: Language in Folk Puppetry'. *The Journal of American Folklore* 94 374. (Oct-Dec 1981) 527-555.
- Rabey, David. *English Drama since 1940*. London: Longman, 2003.
- Redmond, James, ed. *Melodrama*. Cambridge UP, 1992.
- Reinelt, Janelle. *After Brecht: British Epic Theater*. Michigan UP, 1994.
- Rhythms of the World: the Ballad of Ewan MacColl*. Dir. Tim May. BBC 2 14 October 1990.
- Riach, Alan, Dorian Grieve, and Owen Dudley Edwards, eds. *New Selected Letters of Hugh MacDiarmid*. Manchester: Carcanet, 2001.
- Richards, Kenneth, and Laura Richards. *The Commedia dell'Arte: a documentary history*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1990.
- Ritchie, JM. *German Expressionist Drama*. Boston: Twayne, 1976.
- Ritchie, JM, and HF Garten, eds. *Seven Expressionist Plays: Kokoschka to Barlach*. London: John Calder, 1968.
- Roberts, Robert. *The Classic Slum: Salford Life in the first quarter of a Century*. London: Penguin, 1971.
- Rodrigues, Chris, and Chris Garrett. *Introducing Modernism*. Ed. Richard Appignanesi. Royston: Icon, 2004.
- Roose-Evans, James. *Experimental Theatre from Stanislavsky to today*. London: Studio Vista, 1973.
- Roxburgh, Angus, trans. *Marxist-Leninist Aesthetics and the Arts*. Moscow: Progress, 1980.
- Russell, Ian, and David Atkinson. *Folk song: tradition, revival and re-creation*. Elphinstone Institute: University of Aberdeen, 2004.
- Samuel, Raphael, Ewan MacColl, and Stuart Cosgrove. *Theatres of the Left 1880-1935: Workers' theatre movements in Britain and America*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985.
- Schechner, Richard. *Performance Theory*. London: Routledge, 2003.
- Schechter, Joel. *Popular Theatre: a sourcebook*. London: Routledge, 2003.
- Scheunemann, Dietrich, ed. *European Avant-garde: New Perspectives*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000.
- Schmidt, Paul, Ilya Levin, and Vern McGee. *Meyerhold at Work*. New York: Applause, 1996.
- Schwartz, I.A. *The Commedia dell'arte and the influence on French comedy in the Seventeenth century*. Paris, 1933.
- Seeger, Peggy. Telephone call to Claire Altree. 7 April 2006.
- Segal, Erich, ed. *Oxford readings in Aristophanes*. Oxford UP, 1996.
- Sidnell, Michael. *Dances of Death: the Group Theatre of London in the Thirties*. London: Faber and Faber, 1984.
- Sinclair, Upton. *Singing Jailbirds*. California, 1924.
- Sokel, Walter H. *The Writer is Extremis: Expressionism in Twentieth-Century German Literature*. Stanford UP, 1959.

- Sokel, Walter, ed. *An Anthology of German Expressionist Drama: a prelude to the Absurd*. New York: Anchor, 1963.
- Somigli, Luca. *Legitimizing the Artist: Manifesto Writing and European Modernism, 1885-1915*. Toronto UP, 2003.
- Southern, Richard. *The Open Stage*. London: Faber and Faber, 1953.
- Spender, Stephen. *Trial of a Judge*. London: Faber and Faber, 1938.
- Stallworthy, Jon. *Louis MacNeice*. London: Faber and Faber, 1995.
- Stanislavsky, Constantin. *An Actor Prepares*. Trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hopgood. London: Geoffrey Bles, 1972.
- *Building a Character*. Trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood. London: Reinhardt and Evans, 1950.
- *My Life in Art*. Trans. JJ Robbins. London: Geoffrey Bles, 1962.
- Stevenson, Randall. *Modernist Fiction: an introduction*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992.
- Storey, David. *Territory: the claiming of space*. Essex: Pearson, 2001.
- Stourac, Richard, and Kathleen McCreery. *Theatre as a Weapon: Workers' Theatre in the Soviet Union, Germany and Great Britain, 1917-1934*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986.
- Symons, James M. *Meyerhold's Theatre of the Grotesque: the post-Revolutionary Productions, 1920-1932*. Miami UP, 1971.
- Taylor, AJP. *English History 1914-1945*. London: Penguin, 1977.
- Taylor, Richard. *Politics of Soviet Cinema, 1917-1929*. Cambridge UP, 1979.
- Taxidou, Olga. *The Mask: a periodical performance by Edward Gordon Craig*. Amsterdam: Harwood, 1998.
- *Modernism and Performance: Jarry to Brecht*. London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007.
- The Threepenny Opera*. Dir. Sam Wanamaker. Aldwych Theatre, London. 21 March 1956.
- Thomson, Peter, and Glendyr Sacks, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*. Cambridge UP, 1997.
- Tillis, Steve. *Rethinking Folk Drama*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1999.
- Toller, Ernst. *Hoppla*. Trans. Herman Ould. London: Ernest Benn, 1928.
- *Letters from Prison*. Trans. R Ellis Roberts. London: John Lane, 1936.
- *The Machine Wreckers*. Trans. Ashley Dukes. London: Ernest Benn, 1926.
- *Masses and Man*. London: Nonesuch Press, 1924.
- *Plays One*. Trans. and Ed. Alan Raphael Pearlman. London: Oberon, 2000.
- Topic Records. *Pamphlet about the Radio Ballads*. Undated.
<http://www.topicrecords.co.uk/acatalog/index2.html>
- Trewin, JC. *Peter Brook: a biography*. London: MacDonald, 1971.
- Trotsky, Leon. *The Age of Permanent Revolution: A Trotsky Anthology*. Ed. Isaac Deutscher. New York: Dell, 1964.
- Tzara, Tristan. 'Dada Manifesto'. Eds. Vassiliki Kolocotroni, Jane Goldman, Olga Taxidou. *Modernism: an anthology of source and documents*. Edinburgh UP, 1998 276-281.
- Unity Theatre. 'Busmen' and 'One Third of a Nation'. Nottingham Drama texts: Twentieth Century, 1984.
- Vakhtangov, Evgeny. *Evgeny Vakhtangov*. Trans. Doris Bradbury. Moscow: Progress, 1982.
- Vogt, Adolf Max. *Le Corbusier, the Noble Savage: Toward an Archaeology of Modernism*. Trans. Radka Donnell. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT, 1998.
- Wareing, Alfred. 'The League of Audiences' Music and Drama Bill'. *The Musical Times* 78 1130 (1937) 355.

- Watt, David. "The Maker and The Tool": Charles Parker, Documentary performance, and the Search for a Popular Culture'. *New Theatre Quarterly* 19:1 (2003) 41-62.
- Wesker, Arnold. *The Wesker Trilogy*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1960.
- *Chips with Everything*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1962.
- 'Request for Information'. E-mail to Claire Altree. 4 September 2006.
- Weisstein, Ulrich, ed. *Expressionism as an International Literary Phenomenon*. Paris: Didier, 1973.
- Wiles, David. *Greek Theatre Performance: an introduction*. Cambridge UP, 2000.
- Wilkins, Ernest Hatch. *A History of Italian Literature*. Oxford UP, 1954.
- Willett, John. *Expressionism*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1970.
- *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht*. London: A&C Black, 2003.
- Williams, Raymond. *The Country and the City*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1973.
- *Culture and Society*. London: Hogarth, 1990.
- *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1968.
- *The English Novel*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1970
- *Keywords: a vocabulary of Culture and Society*. London: Fontana/Croom Helm, 1976.
- *Politics and Letters: interviews with New Left Review*. London: NLB, 1979.
- 'Realism, Naturalism and their Alternatives'. *Ciné-Tracts* vol. 1 no. 3 (Fall 1977-Winter 1978) 1-7
- Woods, Fred. 'And So We Sang'. *Folk Review* (May-August 1973).
- Woolland, Brian, ed. *Jonsonians*. Hampshire: Ashgate, 2003.
- Worley, Matthew. *Class against Class: the Communist Party in Britain between the Wars*. London: IB Tauris, 2002.
- www.wcml.org.uk/internat/meerut_play.htm
- www.bbc.co.uk/radio2/radioballads/ accessed 18/4/06.
- www.arts.guardian.co.uk/news/story/0,797124,00.html accessed 14/5/07 Ezard, John and Michael Billington. *Obituary for Joan Littlewood*. 23 September 2002.
- www.bl.uk/projects/theatrearchive/mcdonnell.html accessed 14/5/07 Interview with Bill McDonnell, CAST. Interview. By Michael Reuter 2 December 2003.
- www.bl.uk/projects/theatrearchive/cheeseman.html accessed 8/11/06. Interview with Peter Cheeseman 11/11/04. Interview. By Kate Dorney. 11 November 2004.
- Yuill, William. *The Art of Vandalism: Bertolt Brecht and the English Drama*. Inaugural lecture at Bedford College, University of London, 1977.
- 7:84 Clydebuilt Season: reviews and press cuttings 1982-3. National Library of Scotland ACC10893/92.
- 7:84 Clydebuilt Season: general correspondence 1980-2. National Library of Scotland ACC10893/86.
- 7:84 Clydebuilt Season: excerpts from *Uranium 235*. National Library of Scotland ACC10893/93.